FOR THE COOPER PLAN—THE EDITORS

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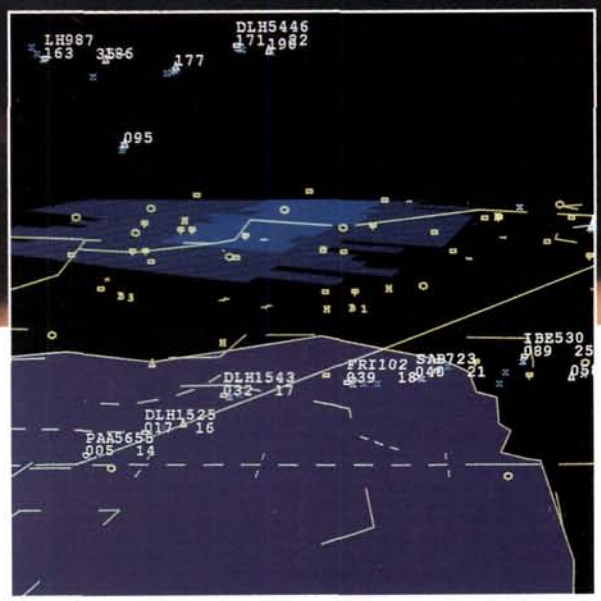

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CORRESPONDENCE

Ironic, isn't it?

To the editors:

Whatever its merits as cultural criticism, Alex Ross's "The Politics of Irony" (November 8) is a total failure as political argument. I will do Ross the courtesy of assuming that he has actually read Thomas Mann, but he obviously hasn't read him very closely. *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, written during World War I, was an ardent defense of Germany against French "civilization" and a strident critique of democracy in the argot of German cultural conservatism. Mann's theory of ironic distancing implied a reactionary politics. In practice, the choice between "radicalism and irony" was actually the choice between the French Revolution and the German counter-revolution, between anarchy and authoritarianism. "No third choice" thus meant: no possibility of a moderate and humane German liberalism. We know where that argument led.

Now Ross informs us: "Clinton buys into the liberal illusion that there is a third choice between radicalism and irony—a choice of reasonableness, decency, meaning." You bet he does. And it is no illusion. Or if it is, the United States itself is an illusion. For reasonableness, decency and meaning have been part of the animating faith of our revolutionary experiment, as distinguished from every other revolution of the past two centuries.

Our culture was not then, and is not now, "drenched in detachment." Our politics was not then, and is not now, determined by ironic detachment from deep principle—let alone from the injustice and suffering that surround us. When we argue about the merits of competing approaches to health care or Somalia, we are hardly engaged in the practice of ironic detachment.

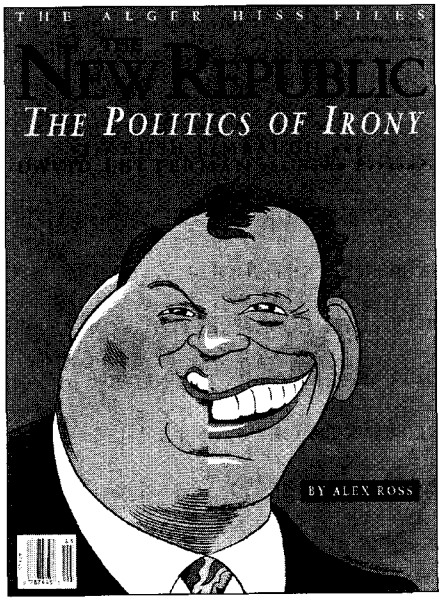
To be sure, the skepticism Ross invokes is widespread, but it is rooted in a certain reality—the failure of government over the past generation to respond effectively to a range of public problems. That skepticism is not our permanent fate, and it does not condemn us to a politics of irony. It is a historically specific creation, and it can be ameliorated by effective leadership in the real world.

The president believes that it is possible to appeal to the American people on the basis of reason rather than images, and generosity rather than resentment. So did THE NEW REPUBLIC in better days, before it began its descent into an aestheticized elitism that so regularly prefers cleverness to wisdom.

WILLIAM A. GALSTON
Deputy Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy

To the editors:

Occasionally, I listen to Rush Limbaugh on long road trips to keep myself from falling asleep at the wheel. Counting the instances where Rush blissfully contradicts himself is as sure an inducement of insomnia as counting sheep is a cure of it. Thus, I am well aware of the phenomenon Alex Ross describes in his article comparing Rush Limbaugh and David Letterman as two purveyors of irony as entertainment. But the comparison ends once you begin to address



their respective audiences.

Letterman's fans are fully aware that he is an entertainer, and appreciate him for it. Limbaugh's fans, who would be more appropriately referred to as disciples, are completely, sometimes purposefully, unaware that he is (or may be) an entertainer. A Letterman fan using the Letterman catch-word "Buttafuoco" in conversation is very different from a Limbaugh disciple saying "Ditto." Letterman's fans watch the irony because they want to laugh, Limbaugh's disciples listen to and watch the irony because they want to agree. This is scary.

It gets more scary the more you think about it. If it is true, as Ross describes, that Limbaugh's "politics" are inherently contradictory, inconsistent and absurd, then what exactly are the disciples agreeing with? Do they know themselves? Perhaps they agree with only the intellectually consistent portions of the show (unlikely). But if they are actually agreeing with the absurdity itself (likely), what then? What can we learn about his audience from this?

The sad thing is that Limbaugh is taking advantage of disgruntled Americans and using them to gain fame and fortune. Yes, Mr. Ross, Rush knows what he's doing; maybe it's his audience that doesn't.

TIM RUSSO
Middleburg Heights, Ohio

To the editors:

Alex Ross fairly nailed the sum and substance of David Letterman, but he struggled in finding a definition of Rush Limbaugh. I suggest Ross just remember that Limbaugh is Pat Boone to Howard Stern's Little Richard and leave it at that.

JEFF TAYLOR
Gaithersburg, Maryland

To the editors:

Why did Alex Ross's article require only two short paragraphs to anoint Bill Clinton with the qualities of "reasonableness, decency and meaning." The reasons the public likes Limbaugh and Letterman are very simple and straightforward. As a nation in mourning, America desperately needs to laugh. Letterman is funny, and Limbaugh tells the truth with humor. On the contrary, Bill Clinton's dishonesty and lack of character does not tickle the funny bone of America. The real Culture War is not about Ross's psychobabble or what is on T.V. after 11:35 p.m., but indeed about preserving the values of those who still believe that a personal investment in honesty and integrity is essential in order to provide effective leadership.

ELMER HILKER
Palmetto, Florida

To the editors:

Cultural War—Irony—Balderdash! To compare Letterman and Limbaugh is absurd. While Letterman slings many a sharp barb, they are not meant in the mean-spirited way of a Limbaugh barb. Limbaugh demeans people and cites fanciful facts all in an effort toward political ends. Letterman is just goofy and fun. Limbaugh is goofy and dangerous. To accept Limbaugh at his word that he "is just an entertainer" is the height of naïveté.

LOIS THOMPSON
Tallahassee, Florida

Alex Ross replies:

One would never guess from William Galston's letter that the vast majority of my article addressed the television style of two talk show hosts, not the political substance of the Clinton administration. My intention was to present a primarily

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cultural rather than political argument. A political argument did evolve in the paragraph from which Galston quotes. Suffice it to say that the equation of reasonableness and decency with "liberal illusion" was a spurious formula that I am happy to retract. Still, even in purely political terms, Galston's elision of human virtue and political style strikes me as too rosy an alternative. Reasonableness, decency, etc. are seldom recorded accurately by the T.V. lens. Every president since Nixon has been elected on the grounds of appearing to be a reasonable, decent man. But who, except those with the confidence of direct acquaintance, can tell the difference? The history of talk shows points to a detached, illusive form of authority in our culture, rivaling political influence.

I inserted a quotation from Mann's *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* in order to hint at the deeper roots of that detachment. This is, indeed, a tortuous and risky book, but hardly a blueprint for authoritarianism. Mann never felt the need to disavow it, even though he embraced the Weimar Republic two years after its publication. Its ambivalent categories are more useful than ever—"radical" and "ironic" represent not left and right, but extremities of style. Along its own wild ironic circuit, *Reflections* led Mann not to Hitler (a radical who preyed on ironists) but to the same decent compromise that Galston all too easily claims from the outset.

Decency and reasonableness and meaning are worthy words that cannot be made real simply by pasting them on placards. Television's dissociative game must be played. The good news, I think, is that tyranny need not be the automatic outcome. There is a possibility of "becoming human" in the ironic arena that Letterman and Limbaugh have both intermittently displayed (and Perot has not). Galston seems blissfully remote from this whole realm. Never mind late night T.V.—he should see *The War Room*, starring James Carville.

Hiss

To the editors:

Apropos "The Hiss Dossier" (by Maria Schmidt, November 8): Now that you publish statements made to the Hungarian secret police as if they were untainted testimony, shall we look forward to a series? Gestapo Confidential? Islands of Fact From the Gulag Archipelago? Caught Red-Handed by the Khmer Rouge? Orwell, thou should'st be living at this hour!

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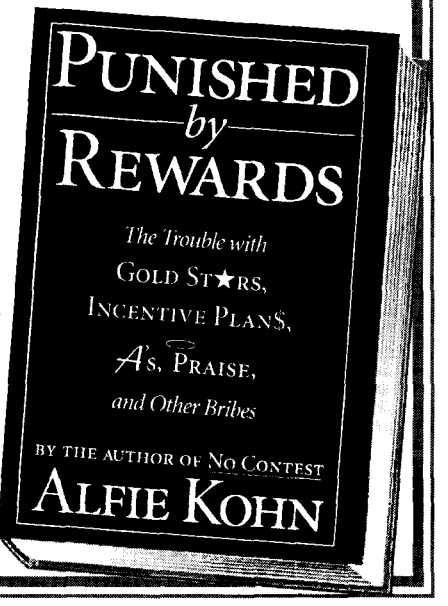
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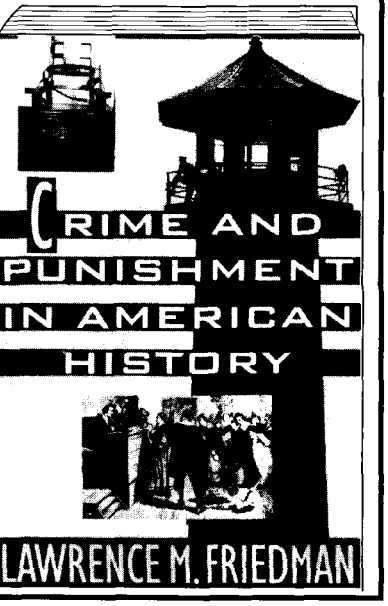

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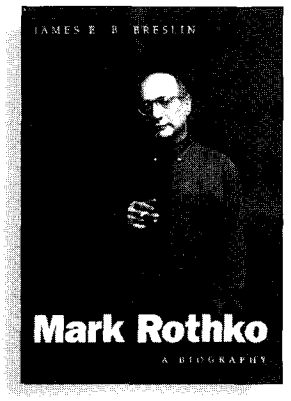

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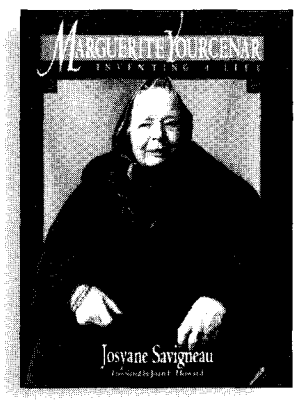

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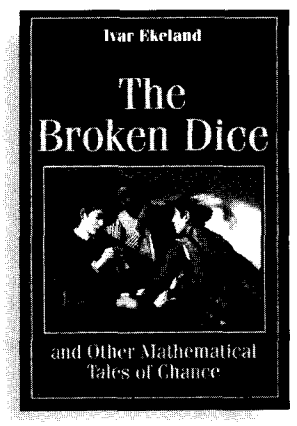

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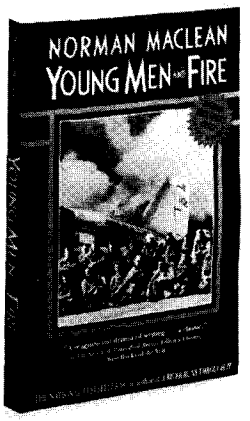

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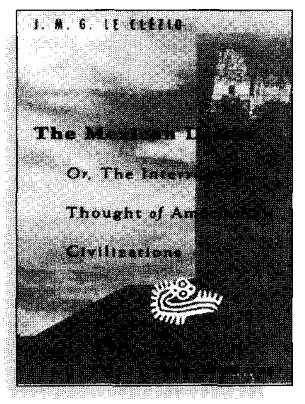

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

DECEMBER 6, 1993

FOR THE COOPER PLAN

Nearly everyone in favor of health care reform agrees on the two basic problems that must be tackled: the large number of uninsured people and the escalation of health care costs. This is not an ideological matter. The desire to solve the first problem comes from a simple humanitarian impulse—it's wrong that any American should live in fear of not receiving decent medical care, or of being financially ruined by sickness. The desire to solve the second problem comes from an economic worry: the market, because of the nature of health care as a product, and the unique third-party method of payment, has become distorted and wastes an increasing amount of economic resources.

So what to do? There are several options available: put government in control of the entire industry to ensure equal universal coverage and complete market control, including price controls and rationing (the Old Democrat option); reform the market to ensure greater efficiency and provide incentives to give everyone the opportunity to buy a decent health care plan (the New Democrat approach, embodied best in Representative Jim Cooper's proposal); reform the market, mandate universal coverage, have government price controls if you need them and have government oversee the entire process (the Clinton plan); or split the difference still further between Clinton and Cooper (the liberal Republican plan touted by Senator John Chafee). There are also various conservative proposals, including Phil Gramm's, which rely entirely on the free market, but this does so little to address either problem that it's hardly worth taking seriously. Our conviction is that health care should be made available to every American citizen; but we also believe that the last thirty years' experience of government overreaching, the complexity of the problem and the law of unintended consequences all point to the superiority of the New Democrat approach.

Cooper's plan bears a family resemblance to Clinton's when it comes to controlling spending. Both aim to rein in rising expenses by restructuring the health care market in a way that sensitizes individuals and employers to costs that are now largely invisible to them. They do this through variants on the idea of managed competition; the plans give small purchasers of insurance buying power by banding them together in statewide cooperatives. These alliances, as they are called in the Clinton version, require insurance companies and health plans to provide information on results. But where Cooper relies purely on managed competition devices, such as the so-called tax cap, which reduces expenditures by limiting the deductibility of employer-provided plans, Clinton loses faith in his market principles and turns to external controls: global budgets, enforced by limits on price increases for insurance.

When it comes to the question of extending coverage, the plans diverge entirely. Clinton relies on mandates: employers have to pay 80 percent of the cost of a basic benefits package, while employees contribute 20 percent. The government guarantees small employers that they won't have to pay more than a fixed percentage of their payroll costs for health insurance. It also offers subsidies to the unemployed and requires them to obtain coverage through the alliances. Cooper, in contrast, has no mandate on employers or individuals: instead, he offers subsidies to individuals who can't afford coverage. His plan proposes a total subsidy for workers at or below the poverty line. The subsidy would decline along the income scale, up to 200 percent of the poverty line, at which point it would disappear altogether. The result is that Cooper's plan promises universal "access" to care rather than the cradle-to-grave guarantee of Clinton's.

Most of its critics identify the lack of universal coverage as a devastating fault in the Cooper plan. But in our view, it's a central strength. Cooper shares with Clinton a desire to extend insurance to the 37 million Americans who currently lack it. He too wants government to regulate the insurance industry in order to remove the barriers that make it impossible for many people to obtain coverage, and leave millions more in fear of losing it. He too thinks government has an obligation to help the poor and near-poor pay for health care. Beyond that, however, Cooper regards medical coverage as a matter of personal responsibility, not a new entitlement. This distinction is what makes Cooper's proposal the true New Democrat alternative, and marks Clinton's as a more traditionally liberal one. The New Democrat says that once government removes the barriers that prevent its citizens from taking care of themselves, it's up to individuals to act on their own behalf.

A more circumscribed view of government's proper role echoes throughout Cooper's plan. Cooper tries to encourage good behavior with incentives such as the tax cap, rather than compelling it by force of law. The result is a system far less bureaucratic and complex than Clin-

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ton's, under which, to take a random example, the cost of a child's health insurance might be met through contributions from four different sources: father's employer, mother's employer, family income and the federal government. It is also one that does less to compromise personal freedom. Cooper places no mandate on employers or individuals. And unlike Clinton, he does not deploy a backup apparatus of price controls, should managed competition fail to work its magic. If people still wish, in full knowledge of what they are doing, and with greater market efficiency, to devote more of their paychecks to health care, Cooper lets them.

It is not certain that Cooper would do a better job than Clinton in controlling costs. But he is willing to face more directly the fact of limits to our resources and choices. Clinton spells out a generous basic benefits package that insurers must offer for a legally controlled price, and plans to make it even more generous in the future. He has included sops for unions and for both large and small employers. There will be no sacrifices in "quality." Gains in efficiency—along with a small tax increase—will pay for it all. Cooper recognizes that we can't have more and more for less and less. His plan would defer the issue of the basic benefits package to the national health care board that his bill would create. It would be up to the board to determine what procedures are "medically appropriate." This is probably necessary as political cover; Cooper is no more inclined to crow about rationing than Clinton. But Cooper seems to understand that the only way to get a handle on the explosion in costs is to declare that basic insurance cannot pay for treatments that are not cost-effective.

What you lose, of course, is the historic watershed of completely guaranteed coverage, which is the major social (and political) attraction of a mandate-based scheme. But whether they are applied to businesses or individuals, mandates are fraught with problems. A requirement that employers provide insurance is sure to cost some jobs. It also ignores the social reality that fewer and fewer American workers are tied to a single company; because mandates of all kinds are a hassle and an expense, employers are increasingly using part-time workers and subcontracting for their labor needs. A health care mandate accelerates this trend even as it clings to the old system. An individual mandate such as the one that forms the basis of the liberal Republican alternative sponsored by Chafee is easier to justify on the same grounds that states require drivers to obtain auto insurance: Those who don't get coverage are free riders, passing costs to everyone else on the road. But an individual health care mandate must be accompanied by the means for everyone to fulfill it. Otherwise, the government is in effect outlawing poverty. And even with a generous subsidy, an individual mandate is nearly impossible to enforce. People who show up in emergency rooms without insurance still have to be treated.

Clinton's plan actually relies on a mixed mandate; as such, it combines some problems of each; it chills job creation, entails massive regulatory power for state-based alliances and applies an unenforceable requirement to individuals. Of course, a system without mandates has a disadvantage, too—it leaves some people uncovered. Which is the graver ill depends largely on how many go without insurance under a Cooper-type scheme. That number is largely a function of how generously the government decides to subsidize low-wage workers. At the level Cooper's subsidies are now set, a family of four with an income of $21,000 would get a subsidy of about $2,000 (toward the purchase of insurance that now costs an average of about $4,000). We'd prefer a more generous package, but under current fiscal conditions, the initial goal should be to remove the structurally uninsured—the working poor and those between jobs—from the ranks of the uncovered. After that, the government could attack a smaller and better-defined uninsured population with targeted incentives. If, for example, large numbers of young people still failed to obtain policies, they might be reached through deferred loan repayments.

The single biggest problem with Cooper's bill is that, like Chafee's, it may encourage the dumping of low-wage workers onto the public system. If the government provides a substantial subsidy, employers will feel less pressure to maintain coverage—especially if government actually *requires* individuals to obtain insurance. This is not necessarily a bad thing; evolution toward a system where individuals rather than businesses shop for health care probably makes sense in the long run. But it is a political problem. As the changeover occurs, more and more Americans will be insured with the aid of a government subsidy. If it happens quickly, this means tax increases to cover the expense. This is an implication the Republican supporters of Chafee's proposal don't seem to have noticed yet. But then, being Republicans, they haven't even stipulated how they intend to pay for the generous subsidies (up to 250 percent of poverty) in their plan. A good place to start is Clinton's proposed seventy-five-cent-a-pack cigarette tax, which Cooper and Chafee should endorse as sound policy in any case. If the revenue isn't needed to pay for the uninsured, the money can go toward reducing the deficit.

No plan is likely to pass next year without the support of the blocks of votes represented by Clinton, Chafee and Cooper. We'd like to see a compromise based on the Cooper version because we think its market-based mechanisms will work best to cover the uninsured and control costs without creating a bureaucratic nightmare. But Cooper's plan wins our support because of an additional virtue, which is connected to the others: restraint. This is a quality appropriate to the enactment of the first major social program since the mixed successes of the War on Poverty and the Great Society. Those examples should encourage liberals not to remake the errors that led to the general distrust of government action, but rather to learn from them in order to win back the public confidence that old-style liberalism lost. Unlike the Clinton plan, Cooper's doesn't envision wholesale remaking of present arrangements. It builds on the system we already have; it's a real step forward, but one that is based on New Democrat pragmatism, rather than Old Democrat ambition. We think it's the place to start. •

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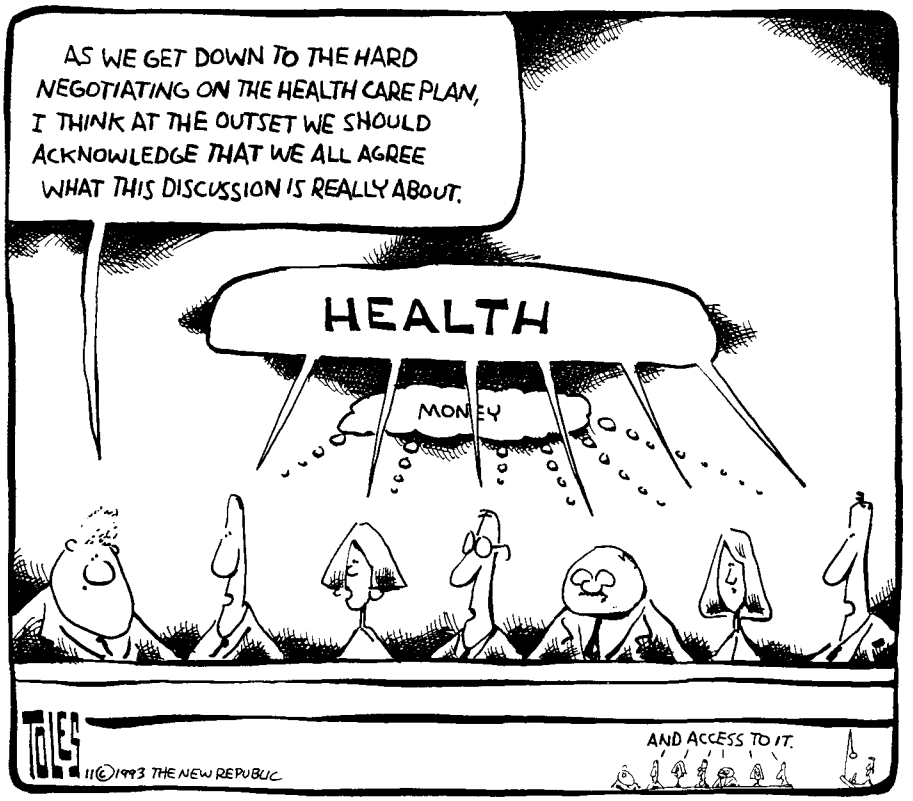
NOTEBOOK

SEX AND REASON: This week, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit became the fourth federal court this year to strike down the Reagan-Bush policy excluding gays from the military. Although the ruling does not explicitly reject the Clinton-Nunn compromise, it's a sign that the courts are now the president's surest ally in this fundamental civil rights battle. We hope—and trust—the administration doesn't appeal the ruling. But the most welcome aspect of Chief Judge Abner Mikva's opinion is that it doesn't recognize homosexuality as a "suspect classification," but holds instead that the military's stated reasons for excluding gays are irrational on their own terms. The "rational basis" approach to gay rights is the same one we endorsed last week (See "Sodom and Demurrer" by Jeffrey Rosen, November 29); it is the argument most secure in legal reasoning and most likely to convince the swing justices, if a similar case comes before the Supreme Court. We note in passing that the other judges on the panel were Patricia Wald and Harry Edwards, one of whose law clerks, Michael Powell, is Colin Powell's son.


AS WE GET DOWN TO THE HARD NEGOTIATING ON THE HEALTH CARE PLAN, I THINK AT THE OUTSET WE SHOULD ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WE ALL AGREE WHAT THIS DISCUSSION IS REALLY ABOUT.
HEALTH
MONEY
AND ACCESS TO IT.
TOLES
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PORN AGAIN: Caving in to pressure from Senate Republicans and right-wing focus groups, President Clinton this week ordered Janet Reno to draft tougher child pornography laws. At issue is the meaning of the Child Protection Act of 1984, which sensibly defines "sexually explicit conduct" to include "lascivious exhibition of the genitals or pubic area." In a Supreme Court brief, Reno and Solicitor General Drew Days endorsed an equally sensible interpretation of this: they said the word "lascivious" means that the child must be depicted "lasciviously," not that the viewer must be thinking lascivious thoughts. They also said that if the child is not naked, the genitals must be visible through very tight or sheer clothing. (Otherwise pictures of cheerleaders might be actionable.) Alas, this wasn't enough for the religious right, who managed to whip up hysteria and threaten to paint the administration as soft on kiddy-porn. And the administration caved. "Whatever the legal issues are here, they are pretty overwhelmed by the political ones," a Clinton official told *The New York Times*. Well, at least they're honest. But if former constitutional law professor Clinton can't resist demagogic threats to civil liberties, what's to distinguish him from George Bush?

NOT IN A MEETING RIGHT NOW: "Former Missouri Governor John Ashcroft will be the principal speaker at the Petroleum Industry Prayer Breakfast at the annual meeting of the American Petroleum Institute in Chicago on Monday, November 8."
—a news release from the American Petroleum Institute (with thanks to Timothy Taylor, Palo Alto, California). Readers are hereby invited to enter a competition to find notices of meetings less attractive than this one. The winner will receive a year's subscription.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS: "Owing to an editing error, Hugo Young's column yesterday described Michael Portillo as 'a con man of a different order of seriousness and coherence from any of his rivals.' What Hugo Young wrote was that Portillo is 'in command of a different order of seriousness.' We apologize to both."
—*The Guardian* of London, November 10, 1993.

MANAGED COMPETITION:

Hillary Clinton Attacks Health Plans Offered by Conservative Democrats

The New York Times, November 9, 1993.

First Lady Reaches Out to Promoters Of Other Plans for Health-Care Reform

Wall Street Journal, same day.
(thanks to L. Richman, New York, New York.)

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THE FLAPJACK FILE

GRAVITRON

By Douglas McGrath

November 1, 1993

Protecting the president is always rough, but lately I have had hardly a minute to write in here. For weeks Flapjack has had members of Congress over for every meal to try to persuade them to support NAFTA. Because there are so many people to convince, he will eat three shifts of each meal just to make sure he talks to them all. "I hate it," he said, licking some hollandaise off his tie, "but this is a sacrifice I must make for my country." Then he asked Leon Panetta if he could lick the hollandaise off his tie.

Today Flap went through four plates of chocolate waffles before Sam Nunn said he would support NAFTA if the president assured him it wouldn't make it easier for men to kiss each other. He wasn't finished till 11:00, and then it was time for the lunch shifts. I think I can now identify the giant sucking sound Perot always talks about.

With all this work, Gergy doesn't like how much time Mr. Steph spends at the gym. He wants him nearby, so he had a Stairmaster and Gravitron installed in Mr. Steph's office. Mr. Steph never draws his blinds, so people can see him working out from the street. The Park Service says he is more popular than the Vietnam Memorial.

November 5

The Vice Flap will debate Perot on NAFTA, a big risk given his tendency to put audiences to sleep, often before he speaks. Therefore, a Dullness Gap meeting was held at the Vice Flap's home. Present were some humor tutors who gave him advice. Howard Stern suggested that any time Perot used a chart, Gore should grab his crotch and say, "Hey Dumbo—chart *this*!" When Gergy pointed out (with relief) that no one would see this because Vice Flap would be seated at a desk, Stern said, "O.K., lose the gesture. Let the wit speak for itself!"

David Letterman suggested that Vice Flap bring a Top Ten List to ridicule Perot. "It could go something like this:

Top Ten Reasons to Question Perot's Judgment
(10) "Who am I and what am I doing here?"
(9) He could afford to buy any painting by Da Vinci or Van Gogh and he collects the guy who did covers for the *Saturday Evening Post.*
(8) Looks like Granny on "The Beverly Hillbillies."
(7) "Who am I and what am I doing here?"
(6) You have to *remind* him to bring his charts.
(5) His running mate could turn his hearing aid off—what will the rest of us do?
(4) Even Madonna hasn't slept with him!

At that point, Gergy decided that Letterman had helped enough.

November 8

Flap met with the ex-presidents to discuss strategy on NAFTA. "Hello Dick, Jerry, Jimmy, Ron and George," he said warmly. "How are Betty, Rosalyn, Nancy and Barbara?" He put an arm around Nixon as he seated him. "I want to re-express our sympathies about Pat, inquire about your new book which I read in galleys during the commercial breaks on 'Baywatch' and congratulate you on the thirty-fourth anniversary of your kitchen debate with Khrushchev. I often have a debate in the kitchen myself, but usually it's about whether Double-Stuff Oreos are better than two regular Oreos stacked on top of each other." Then he asked for their advice about dealing with Congress.

Nixon suggested bringing NAFTA opponents into the "majesty of the White House" and then explaining the deal's national security importance to them. "If that doesn't work," he said, "crush their nuts and make them cry." Flap flinched at this, but before he could respond, Reagan said, "Let me say one thing to you: Congress is a pain in the keister, if you don't mind my using a word I picked up in the Army when I liberated the concentration camps in Europe and, well, elsewhere." Carter said, "It is incredible you keep saying that! You spent the war in *Hollywood*!" Reagan's face got cloudy and cross and he said, "Pardon me, Mr. Twelve Electoral Votes, but I think you're the last person to talk about liberating hostages!" Nixon said, "'Atta boy, Ron! Crush his nuts!"

At the end, they asked for autographs. Flap was thrilled until he realized they meant Mr. Steph's. They all said it was for their granddaughters, except Reagan, who said it was for his son.

November 14

The Vice Flap was tremendous in the debate; so good, in fact, that the Flap is depressed. "Why is no one praising *me*?" he asked forlornly in Mr. Steph's office. "After all, *I'm* the one who had the good sense to get someone to debate in my place!" He was so stressed out about this, as well as the continuing shortage of votes on NAFTA, that he began working out on the Gravitron. "I just wish the lord—or the House leadership—would give me a sign that this bill will pass, just one sign," he said, reaching for his McGrilled Chicken sandwich with his foot. This threw the Gravitron out of line and it catapulted the Flap into the air. The crowd outside on the street screamed, fearing for Mr. Steph's life.

Flap hit the floor, but the floor took the worst of it. He sighed. "O.K. lord," he said wearily, finishing his sandwich. "How about the best two out of three signs?"

DOUGLAS MCGRATH is a New York writer.

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Why the pencil will survive.

A RUB-OUT?

By Henry Petroski

The announcement by the Educational Testing Service this week that it plans to replace pencil and paper with computers on its standardized tests prompts a question. Is this:

(*a*) an end to No. 2 pencils in the exam room?
(*b*) an end to No. 2 pencils?
(*c*) an end to all pencils?
(*d*) none of the above?

The answer—despite the doom and gloom front-page stories in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*—is (*d*). After all, this is not the first time that the sturdy, low-tech pencil has been threatened. Technological advances and materials shortages have written its obituary many times before. And each time, the plucky implement, seemingly on the verge of extinction, left for dead, has bounced back to life.

The modern pencil dates from the middle of the sixteenth century, when a new mineral that made a dark but removable mark was discovered in England's Lake District. The new mineral was called black lead, because it made a blacker line than metallic lead, which had been among the most common means of making a mark on paper without the mess and bother of ink and quill. Black lead also had military applications, especially in casting cannon balls, and so the English mine from which it came was closely guarded and its output regulated. This made the smallest sliver of black lead very costly. Thus the lead, as it had come to be called, was encased in wood not only to keep the fingers clean, but to protect the pricey substance from breaking. The assemblage of lead and wood was called a pencil, after the fine brush known as a *penicillum* that dated back to Roman times.

With the growth of chemical knowledge, pencil lead was found in 1779 to be a form of carbon. It was then given the name graphite, after the Greek word meaning "to write." (The substance that was found so effective in rubbing out pencil marks was called rubber.) When at war with the English in the late eighteenth century, the French could not get pure graphite, and so an engineer named Nicolas-Jacques Conté was assigned the task of coming up with a way of making good pencils out of poor graphite. He found that if he recombined refined graphite with a clay binder, and if he baked the mixture into a ceramic, he could make pencils as good as the renowned English ones. He found, further, that by altering the proportions of graphite and clay, he could make pencils that made lighter and darker marks. Conté used the numbers one, two, etc., to designate different degrees of hardness in his pencils.

Although Henry David Thoreau did not need to take any standardized test to enter college, pencils were instrumental in paying his way through Harvard. Thoreau's father, John, was an early American pencil-maker, and when Henry David could not keep a teaching job after his graduation in 1837, he worked at the family business, seeking ways to improve the product. He developed the French process to such a degree that by the mid-1840s Thoreau pencils were the best made in America, and Ralph Waldo Emerson bragged that they were made right in Concord. Soon, however, the expanding German pencil firms flooded the American market with their less expensive products, and the Thoreaus were driven out of the pencil business.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the English source of graphite had been exhausted. At about the same time an equally rich and pure source had been discovered in Asia, and the German firm A.W. Faber gained exclusive rights to it. Soon, Siberian graphite became the world standard for pencils, and other manufacturers began to color their pencils yellow and give them names like Mongol and Mikado to suggest that they too originated in Asia. This influence remains today, with about three out of every four pencils finished in yellow.

From the beginning of pencil-making, the quality of the wood has been as important as that of the graphite, and red cedar from the southeastern United States was long the wood of choice. By the early twentieth century, however, supplies of red cedar became so scarce that pencil-makers bought old barns and fence posts to stay in business. In time, incense cedar from the western United States was found to be a substitute wood, and that is what is most likely to be in a good No. 2 today. Of late, there has been some concern that jelutong, a tropical rain forest tree, is being used increasingly for less expensive pencils. To counter concerns that pencils are wasteful of resources, one company came out with the American EcoWriter pencil, which uses recycled cardboard and newspaper fiber. Perhaps it will be more readily accepted than the plastic variety of some years ago.

The humble wood-case pencil has survived the exhaustion of its earliest and best sources of graphite and red cedar; it has survived the introduction of the mechanical pencil, the fountain pen, the ball-point; it has survived the development of the typewriter and the personal computer (which killed the typewriter); and it will survive the recasting of standardized tests into a new cyber-tech format. There are some things, simply, that technology cannot improve on. Compared to the handy, durable, effective pencil, the mouse is, well, a mouse.

HENRY PETROSKI, professor of civil engineering at Duke University, is author of *The Pencil* (Knopf).

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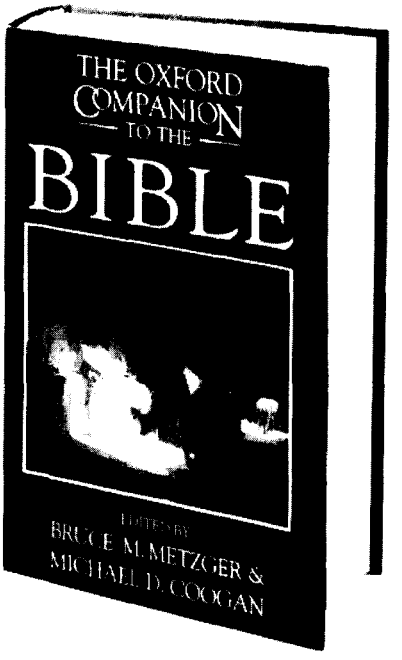

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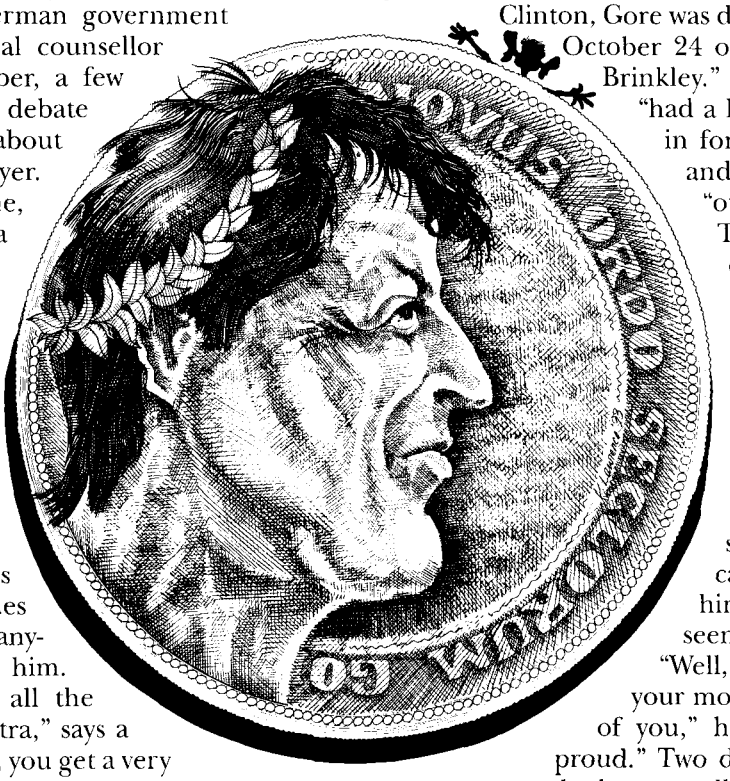
MORE GORE

By Fred Barnes

Maybe the jokes will cease, given Vice President Albert Gore's newly enhanced role in foreign policy and his vanquishing of Ross Perot in the NAFTA debate. You know, the jokes about how Gore realized he would have to settle for being a heartbeat away from the vice presidency. On the contrary, Gore "now has the cachet to be seen all over the world as an important figure," insists a senior White House official. That's probably an overstatement. But when a delegation of German government officials visited presidential counsellor David Gergen in November, a few days after Gore's televised debate with Perot, they talked about Gore as a big-time player. Gore's environmental tome, *Earth in the Balance*, is a best-seller in Germany.



The emergence of Gore is an extraordinarily sensitive issue at the White House. For one thing, his new job as a major spokesman on foreign policy threatens to diminish the role of Secretary of State Warren Christopher. Thus, to ease Christopher's fears, White House aides claim Gore isn't displacing anyone, just supplementing him. "You want to hear from all the instruments in the orchestra," says a senior official. "With Gore, you get a very distinct and compelling sound." Then, there is the perennial concern a vice president's gain comes at the expense of the president. Gore's advocates, for example, tout his debate triumph as crucial to NAFTA's ratification. "It changed the political landscape," says Mack McLarty, the White House chief of staff. Others are more restrained. "It helped," says senior adviser George Stephanopoulos dryly.

Weeks before Gore's debate with Perot on November 8, President Clinton decided to beef up his foreign policy team. The reason was obvious: the policy was a near-disaster, and Clinton was under sharp attack. "We need more people who can speak with authority across the board," says a Clinton aide. "Given the hits we've taken on foreign policy, we need people there especially." But Clinton didn't want to fire any of the principals: Christopher, national security adviser Tony Lake or Defense Secretary Les Aspin. So Clinton went to Gore in October and asked him to speak out more on foreign affairs. There had been no formal discussions about this move, no consultations with Congress. But Gore's two biggest boosters at the White House, McLarty and Gergen, strongly promoted it.

There was no announcement of Gore's elevation, if only to spare hurt feelings, and no directive was issued. Gore got no new authority. But, says McLarty, "he will be more visible." In any case, Gore was already active in foreign policy. The president designated him to carry out talks with Russia on technology and to work out plans for a joint space mission months ago. Gore will visit Russia from December 11 to 18 and confer with President Boris Yeltsin, a precursor to Clinton's trip to Russia in January. And he "played a critical role in Haiti," says Stephanopoulos. "He was on the phone with [President Jean-Bertrand] Aristide a lot." After being tapped by Clinton, Gore was dispatched to hold forth on October 24 on "This Week with David Brinkley." The administration has "had a large number of successes in foreign policy," he asserted, and Clinton's team consists of "outstanding individuals." This was a tough sell. Gore did better against Perot.

The president was enthusiastic about Gore's performance against the Texan. He watched the debate at the White House residence, greeting McLarty afterward with a double thumbs-up sign. They immediately called Gore to congratulate him. McLarty had recently seen Gore and his father. "Well, Mr. Vice President, I know your mother and father are proud of you," he said. "We're almost as proud." Two days later, Clinton was approached repeatedly as he toured a Veterans Hospital by people who said they had watched the debate and now support the free trade agreement with Mexico. "That was just indicative of what members of Congress heard," McLarty says. His theory is that Gore made it possible for covert NAFTA backers to come out of the closet. "He took away the reason for saying, 'I'm with you on substance, but I can't go with you for political reasons.'"

Gore succeeded beyond his wildest dreams in the debate. No matter what happened, Gore figured he would win on facts. His fear was that Perot would toss off a half-dozen one-liners and, as one aide put it, "dominate in a theatrical sense." But Gore, unusually succinct, won on

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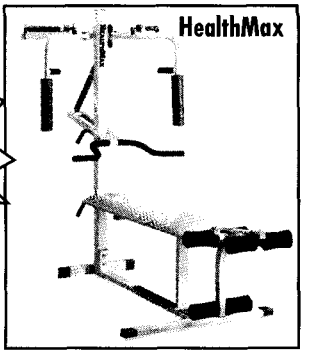

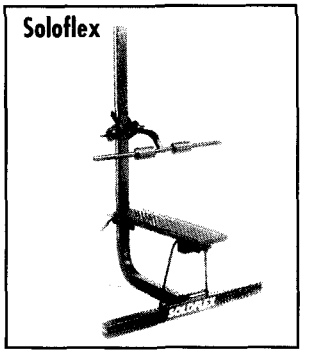

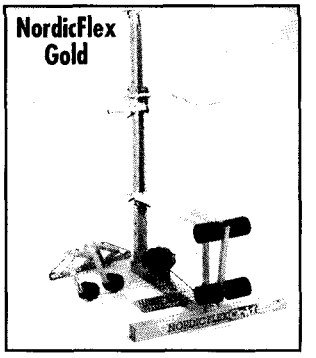

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style. In a videotaped practice, he had been long-winded, giving a five-minute answer to the first question (Why are you for NAFTA?). His trainers halted the session and told him to be less verbose, like Perot. Gore never considered debating anyone but Perot. "We were convinced Perot was hurting NAFTA," says a Gore adviser. "Congress was hearing from people who'd been worked up by him. We had to confront him directly." Why on "Larry King Live" on CNN? Gore knew Perot wouldn't be able to say no, since he had appeared so often on King's show. King later described the audience for the debate as the biggest ever on cable T.V. Roughly 46 percent of all Americans saw all or part of it, and it prompted a massive shift in public opinion from undecided to pro-NAFTA.

What surprised Gore and his aides was how thin-skinned Perot is. Perot unraveled when Gore countered his standard charges. This was no accident. The White House has developed an extensive file on Perot. Democratic Representative Mike Synar of Oklahoma, who played Perot in practice sessions with Gore, says it includes "practically everything Perot has written or said over a lifetime." Gore spent two full days studying the Perot material. He was ready when Perot said government estimates are unreliable. He reminded Perot that he had predicted 40,000 American soldiers would be killed in Desert Storm and 100 banks would fail after last year's election. Perot looked stricken. And when Perot blamed NAFTA on foreign-paid lobbyists in Washington, Gore said Perot had hired a platoon of lobbyists to press the House Ways and Means Committee for tax breaks. Perot sputtered an unpersuasive denial. For days afterward, Gore's office got calls from lobbyists who said they had worked for Perot.

The debate breakthrough and bigger role in foreign affairs couldn't come at a better time for Gore. His gig as head of the National Performance Review is over, though he gets regular updates from aide Elaine Kamarck on how its recommendations for "reinventing government" are doing. The answer at the moment is: not well. The Congressional Budget Office gauged the savings from the NPR's first installment at $350 million over six years, not $9.1 billion as the administration (and Gore) had proclaimed. The difference stems partly from the higher savings the administration attributes to early retirement of federal employees. It's a dispute over arcane methods of budget "scoring." The trouble for Gore is CBO's scoring has more credibility than his.

On second thought, maybe the jokes won't stop. Gore's buddy Synar says his new stature means he's "not just a partner [to Clinton] but an equal partner." Well, not quite. Gore is still vice president. He's no hero to many of the younger, more liberal White House staffers. They see him, correctly, as an ally of the moderate faction, headed by McLarty and Gergen. And they relish the jokes about Gore. True, Gore has lightened up—he's not quite the cigar store Indian of the Clinton administration anymore—but he's still a bit stiff. As one joke in Washington has it, Gore is so dull the Secret Service has a special code name for him. It's "Al Gore." •

BUDAPEST POSTCARD

My Friend Tony

By Michael Lewis

Last week I took one of Hungary's three highways south of Budapest in search of some money that had been stolen from me. The theft had a slightly complicated history. A few years ago a very successful American financier friend of mine persuaded me to invest in a Hungarian company. The company was then advising the government on how to sell its assets—i.e., the entire economy. My friend's plan was to use the company's expertise to purchase from the inept Hungarian government several million dollars of these assets at a small fraction of their true value. A lot of shrewd financial people wanted a piece of the deal—Eastern Europe was then considered a land of opportunity—and I recall feeling the deepest gratitude toward my friend for what was at bottom a sentimental invitation: He intended to rename the Hungarian company after the pseudonym I had given him the year before in my book about Wall Street, *Liar's Poker*. Our Hungarian financial empire would be called Alexander & Co.

A year and a half after its birth, Alexander & Co. came to grief. Our Hungarian employees, I was told, had stolen everything. I accepted the explanation, attempted briefly to be amused by my inability to resist the dangerous desire to get rich quickly, and forgot about it.

Until last week. At breakfast one morning at one of Budapest's ballroom-sized coffeehouses, I was handed a slip of paper that read: "Look aut! Take care of your money and handbags, please!" The local newspaper featured a story, headlined "Banditry Threatens Hungarian Economy," about an epidemic of pickpocketing in the capital. An American friend told me that nearly every package she received from home was rifled by Hungarian postal employees. Another friend—one of the many 30-year-old investment bankers flown in by the U.S. government to help Hungary sell off its businesses—explained that the American investor here exists to be looted by whichever Hungarian spots him first.

Soon I ceased to think of my loss as a crime and began to view it as a legitimate cross-cultural experience. It must have been one of the first instances of the sort of corruption that has given all former Communist countries a bad name with foreign investors, and has rendered these economies so moribund. About the only nice thing to be said about the Hungarian economy—zero growth, vanishing assets, 12 percent unemployment, 25 percent inflation—is that it is slightly less of a disaster than those around it. But now even Hungary seems

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trapped in the vicious Eastern European cycle: the collapse of its inefficient industries heightens the general panic, which in turn increases the likelihood that those who can will steal. On and on it goes, the corruption discouraging investment and the lack of investment encouraging even more corruption. So I wondered: How did it start?

It turned out that the Hungarian privateers who had made off with our money continued to operate shamelessly in their home city of Szèkesfehèrvàr, about an hour southwest of Budapest. They were led by a man named Antal—his friends called him Tony. Apparently Tony had exhibited a near-Gergenesque ability to remake himself in the image of the reigning dogma. Before becoming an expert on the private sector he had been the Communist mayor of a medium-sized city. Why he agreed to meet me I could not imagine; as far as he knew, I intended to turn him upside down and shake him until my money fell out.

Following Tony's instructions, I drove with an interpreter to the city's main bus station and waited in the snow. Pallid Hungarians huddled everywhere around us in earth-toned lumps. My interpreter complained, rightly, that since Tony had no idea what we looked like and we had no idea where Tony was, we were lost. But from the depressing gridlock of dented Omnis and gasping Minis there emerged an enormous, shiny, gold Mercedes-Benz. Out of the car stepped a long, lean, tanned young man in a magenta suit and paisley tie: Tony's driver. Tony himself stood waiting for us in a muddy driveway outside the surprisingly austere offices of what had once been Alexander & Co. His manner I can only describe as deeply aggrieved. He wanted to see me, he said, because the world needed to know the full scope of the injustice that had been committed. He then told me a story. I would later see proof that it was true. It went as follows:

At the end of the 1980s—Tony refused to recall anything before the most recent revolution, claiming that he had "always been in privatization"—he had opened his consulting company. After his company became profitable, he received a call from a polished group of Western investors. The Westerners promised to bring to his business not only capital but expertise. Tony feared that with the sudden infusion of savvy Western financiers into the Hungarian economy he would soon be unable to compete. He sold out, he said, mainly in self-defense.

"The first thing they [meaning us] did," he continued, "was to bring in an English managing director." I vaguely recalled something about this. "I learned only later that this Englishman had never managed anything. He was a very nice man. He played the violin beautifully. I would have gladly accepted him as an uncle. He just didn't know anything about business. He settled down and had a marvelous time. Then he started to reorganize the company according to English principles. For the first time, we began to lose money."

Over the next several hours this former Communist Party hack laid out the history of his dealings with his new Western bosses, growing more indignant by the minute. His chief complaint, issued repeatedly, was that "we were all working for the same fixed salary, so people stopped working. Who would be interested in working hard for a company where your salary is 100,000 florins, regardless of whether you bring in 3 million florins or you bring in nothing?" At the end of this horror story I asked what exactly had become of my investment. The money, Tony explained, had been spent by the Englishman on various harebrained schemes. "This English managing director was very high overhead," he said. "He rented a very expensive apartment. He flew in his furniture from England. He put a BMW 735 at his private disposal. He took trips to London every week. I could go on." He went on. He boasted several times that since he had struck out on his own, he had once again become profitable. "So in the end," he said, "it was us who had the capitalist approach and you who had the Socialist approach." No doubt there's a long list of reasons why Hungary is slowly becoming an economic embarrassment. And somewhere on it, a place should be made for the American investor and the English businessman. •

The Pentagon quits Somalia.

SPINNING DUNKIRK

By Michael Maren

MOGADISHU

Last Sunday, Col. Steven Rausch concluded his daily 5:00 p.m. briefing to the Mogadishu press corps with the following announcement: "We have two media opportunities for you tomorrow. At 3:00 p.m., rescue training at Victory Base and at 4:00 p.m. tank gunnery at range six. If anyone is interested in attending see Maj. Pullen after the briefing." The reporters in the room smirked at each other. This was starting to sound like day camp.

Though media opportunities were always a part of covering the war in Somalia, they've become daily fare since Rausch and his team arrived in Mogadishu on October 17. Rausch, middle-aged, soft-spoken and business-like, leads the thirty-six-member Pentagon Joint Information Bureau, or JIB. Until the bureau's arrival, when the United States was still pretending its soldiers were just one part of the United Nations force, the military's P.R. was handled solo by Maj. David Stockwell, his American uniform disguised with a blue U.N. patch. In press briefings these days the jiblets, as they are known, outnumber reporters by as many as three to one. They

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tempt journalists with offers of helicopter rides over Mogadishu and trips to aircraft carriers, complete with air shows, baseball caps and shopping at the ship's P.X. This week reporters got to see soldiers practice rescue operations in abandoned buildings.

When some 400 vehicles, including Bradley assault vehicles and Abrams M1-A1 tanks, arrived at the port of Mogadishu in early November, it became another media opportunity. This one came with a Hollywood title—Task Force 164: Convoy to Victory Base. To cover the event, the JIB offered two accommodation plans. Option 1: Ride with the convoy to Victory Base, your choice of Humvee, armed personnel carrier (APC) or truck. (Sorry, no tank rides.) Option 2: Catch the convoy en route past the airport and then board a helicopter, watch the spectacle from the sky and then be there to welcome the convoy to Victory Base. Every reporter was assigned a personal jiblet. I chose Option 1, and squeezed into an APC with my jiblet, a young woman sergeant who made me uncomfortable by insisting on calling me "sir."

Before we pulled out of the port I had the chance to talk to the soldiers, recently arrived from Fort Stewart, Georgia. When asked if they knew why they were in Somalia, each of them recited verbatim, from President Clinton's October 7 speech, the three goals of the mission. We're here to protect our troops and bases, keep roads and lines of communication open so relief food can flow and keep the pressure on the bad guys. All of the soldiers, it turned out, had received extensive instruction in dealing with the press. (The October issue of the Army's *Soldiers* magazine describes "media on the battlefield training": instructors, portraying journalists armed with notebooks and cameras, descend on the troops and start asking questions.) The way things have been planned in Somalia, the press will likely be the only resistance they have to face.

The convoy rolled down a just-completed road that took it to the airport, along the beach, around Mogadishu and out of town. The American firepower was kept as far away as possible from any confrontation with Somalis. From my APC in the middle of a huge convoy, it was apparent that the U.S. operation in Somalia no longer has anything at all to do with Somalia. It is now a show to prove that America did not back down after eighteen of its soldiers were killed on October 3. It is meant to demonstrate that when we leave in March, we will have, in President Clinton's words, done the job right. The JIB's mission is to make sure the world gets the message—no matter what actually happens.

From the ground here in Mogadishu, Clinton's three goals make hardly any sense. First, there is little need to protect our troops. Since the administration called off the hunt for Mohamed Farah Aideed, American soldiers have rarely left the barracks, and Aideed isn't about to go in and get them. The Americans are, after all, leaving in four months. Second, the "lines of communication" and humanitarian relief routes are already open. To say they aren't is a transparent effort to re-spin the mission in the humanitarian terms so popular last year. The relief agencies I visited were getting their supplies; in four weeks of driving around Mogadishu I have yet to encounter a roadblock on a major route. Finally, the United States has deliberately taken the pressure off Aideed. A month ago, every ambush and shooting in Mogadishu was blamed on the warlord or his militia. Today, press officers take pains to describe the daily dose of mayhem as the doings of bandits. When a 22-year-old American U.N. worker was killed last week, and his vehicle stolen by known members of Aideed's militia, the U.N. announced that the gunmen were "freelancing." When I questioned an American officer about the absurdity of the three goals, he just grinned and said, "Exactly. The mission can't fail. We need to be able to claim one success before we leave on March 31."

Only the P.R. war is being fought with any enthusiasm. Against the growing impression that thousands of American soldiers were sent to Somalia on a face-saving mission, it was announced that the Americans would establish a "presence" on the streets. Exactly what that "presence" will consist of or when it will begin has never been made clear. At press briefings, when Rausch is asked about the presence, he says "soon" or "not yet." When Ambassador Robert Oakley was in Somalia in early November, he met with representatives of Aideed's Somali National Alliance and informed them that the U.S. troops wanted to venture outside their barracks. Later he reported that an agreement had been reached: American soldiers would be able to patrol the streets; Aideed's militia wouldn't shoot them.

In Mogadishu and around Somalia, people expect the civil war to start again when the Americans—along with the French, Belgians and Germans—head home. The remaining force, made up largely of Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Malaysians, will be vulnerable—if they choose to stay. No one expects them to get involved if clan warfare starts up again. Even the U.N.'s own intelligence indicates that the March 31 withdrawal, actually scheduled to begin in mid-December, will be the beginning of a new disaster. A high-ranking U.S. military official, who spoke only on the condition of anonymity, summed it up: "Aideed will take it all."

As the U.N. watches and the United States poses, Somalia's warlords are preparing for round two. Warlord Mohammed Hersi Morgan, who made good use of the fixation with Aideed to rest and rearm his militia, is already reoccupying Kismayo, anticipating the December withdrawal of Belgian troops. The Belgians, who just want to go home, have decided not to resist. Last month, very quietly, Aideed's forces captured the town of Brava, an important port south of Mogadishu.

Meanwhile, the U.N. is running around setting up district and regional councils to participate in the transitional government that, under the U.N. plan, will take over when the foreigners leave. All over Somalia, however, people are complaining that the councils have been hurriedly assembled, serving only to meet the U.N.'s timetable, while ignoring Somalia's complex political problems. "Anyone who's worked for UNOSOM and the police and others who have cooperated with

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UNOSOM, are in danger when we leave," says the military official. "By going ahead and putting people on these district and regional councils, we're probably sentencing them to death."

By the time that happens, however, the United States soldiers will be gone. And, if Col. Rausch and his jiblets succeed, it won't matter. The national consciousness will have been spun: we left Somalia on our own terms, we met our goals, we did the job right.

MICHAEL MAREN is writing a book about the Somali conflict.

Mr Laski and THE NEW REPUBLIC.

OUR HAROLD

By Isaac Kramnick

When Ayn Rand created Elsworth Toohey, the foil of free enterprise individualism, in her 1943 novel *The Fountainhead*, she patterned him on Harold Laski, the English Socialist who would have been 100 this year. In 1947, when Albert Einstein was asked by the founders of Brandeis University to pick the school's first president, he chose Laski, who, knowing much more about American political culture than Einstein, declined. The controversial Laski who so differently impressed Rand and Einstein was also, it turns out, an important figure in the history of THE NEW REPUBLIC. More of that shortly, but first, who was Harold Laski?

During the first half of the twentieth century, Laski was the most important Socialist intellectual in the English-speaking world. He tempered the abstractions of continental Marxism with his own mixture of Anglo-American pragmatism and faith in democracy to become the principal theorist of democratic socialism.

A professor of political science at the London School of Economics from 1920 until his death in 1950, Laski published more than twenty books, including such landmark works as the *Grammar of Politics* (1925), *Liberty in the Modern State* (1930) and *The American Democracy* (1948). He was also a much sought-after teacher; his students ranged from Krishna Menon to the Kennedys (Joe in 1934; Jack in 1935) to Pierre Trudeau.

The influence of Laski's ideas went far beyond the classroom, however. As a publicist for socialism, he wrote hundreds of articles for the political "weeklies" in Britain and America. He lectured constantly: on the BBC, at army bases, on worker education weekends. And he was involved in party politics, serving as a member of the Labour Party's National Executive from 1937 to 1949 and as its chairman in 1945, when Labour stunned the world by defeating Churchill.

Before all this, though, Laski got his start at THE NEW REPUBLIC, and he remained connected to it throughout his life. He was introduced to the magazine in 1915 by his good friend, Felix Frankfurter, with whom he taught at Harvard during and after World War I. Frankfurter in turn was a friend of Herbert Croly, the magazine's first editor. THE NEW REPUBLIC had been founded a year earlier by Willard Straight with money from his socially conscious heiress wife, Dorothy Whitney Straight. In addition to Croly, the initial set of editors included Walter Lippmann, who had recently published his first book, *A Preface to Politics*. Alvin Johnson, the magazine's resident economist and social scientist, was recruited from Straight's alma mater, Cornell. The magazine was modeled on England's *The New Statesman*, launched by Sidney and Beatrice Webb the previous year. The new Labour Party in Britain and its amalgam of liberal and Socialist ideas was particularly appealing to THE NEW REPUBLIC set, most of whom were unabashed Anglophiles. Frankfurter's young friend Laski, who came to write book reviews and editorials, fit in beautifully. Like the rest of them, he was youthfully irreverent and passionate in his commitment to reform.

It was in THE NEW REPUBLIC that Laski, then 23, published in July 1916 the essay that brought him widespread notice among American intellectuals. His "Apotheosis of the State" outlined the idea he would develop in his writings over the next ten years into the antistatist theory he called "pluralism." Indeed, Laski was the first to use the word "pluralism" in political discourse. In his article, he rejected the argument that one's obligations were primarily to the state because it was "sovereign" and only secondarily to unions, churches or clubs. Those associations, he argued, had actual wills and personalities, too. Moreover, people felt real obligations to them, which competed with loyalty to the state and often overrode it. This "pluralist" vision, Laski insisted, "starts from the concrete world we know." Political allegiance was tentative. The state claimed to seek the common purposes and the general good of all, but the "analysis of hard facts" demonstrates that the only good achieved was that "of a certain section of the state, not the community as a whole." The trade unionist sees "nothing absolute or unqualified" about his obligations to the state. On the contrary, Laski argued, it is not "right" for him to obey the state when it serves only the capitalist's good. For what "I mean by right is something the pragmatist will understand. It is something the individual ought to concede because experience has proved it to be good."

Laski's article produced a flurry of responses from his colleagues. Croly, a vigorous exponent of state power as the engine of democratic reform, was critical, while Lippmann tended to walk between the extremes represented by his two friends. Their questioning of Laski notwithstanding, they both marveled at the

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thoughtfulness and boldness of their colleague's demystification of the abstract state, even as World War I forever transformed and enhanced the power of the real American state.

It is striking how during these war years Laski was invariably linked to THE NEW REPUBLIC. His elderly friend Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. wrote that Laski, "who seems to have read everything, is contributing to the weekly NEW REPUBLIC articles that flabbergast me by their variety and knowledge." In 1918, when an alumnus complained to Radcliffe's president, Labaron Briggs, about Laski preaching socialism and pacifism to "Radcliffe girls," the president replied: "As Mr. Laski is a Harvard instructor, I am turning your letter over to president Lowell. I had not known him to be a pacifist, or even a Socialist, though he has written for THE NEW REPUBLIC, and THE NEW REPUBLIC, which I am taking this year for the first time, gives me considerable unease—rather from its attitude about society and labor than from the suspicion of pacifism."

Courtesy Andrew Matthewson

HAROLD LASKI IN HIS LONDON STUDY

Though Laski left America in 1920 for the LSE, he maintained his ties to the magazine. During his lifetime he wrote more than fifty articles for THE NEW REPUBLIC. He would invariably send the magazine his observations on America after each of his visits in the 1930s and 1940s. In one such piece he described a nation with "a fear of innovation, a distrust of doubt ... a persecuting temper." Governing America was "a system of dogmas, narrow and ignorant and crude, preached with all the fierce intensity of a medieval superstition; men are asked to bow down before it." The heart of this worship was "the Moloch of property." American businessmen had not yet even "learned the elementary significance of the trade unions," let alone anything about the inevitability of "democratic control in industry."

It was in a NEW REPUBLIC article that Laski used esoteric constitutional precedents to support FDR's ill-fated scheme to pack the Supreme Court. And it was in the magazine that Laski published, in the summer of 1942, one of his most controversial articles, an attack on Churchill, whom he accused of seeking victory over Hitler only "to protect the old way of life, the old world that is dying, not for a new world that is struggling to be born." After a trip to Russia in 1946, Laski wrote four articles praising the Soviet Union's socialist zeal while attacking its repressive secret police and lack of free elections.

When Laski visited New York, THE NEW REPUBLIC staff always gave him a dinner party. Edmund Wilson, the great writer and critic and a former NEW REPUBLIC editor, described these occasions in a *New Yorker* article in 1953. The American journalists loved Laski's "high-powered intelligence," his wit and warmth, even as they suspected him of telling tall tales. "The tiny guest of honor, gleaming through his round glasses, with something of the schoolmaster's manner that overlay the impulses of the schoolboy, would sit plying us affably with questions and evincing a courteous interest, helping us out with the precise figures on some such matter as an ancient plebiscite in some faraway country, which nobody could contradict. When he had claimed, on one of these occasions, to have been told something or other in confidence by a certain Soviet official and was reminded by somebody present that this man had not at the time been a commissar," Wilson wrote, "he ignored the interpolation and passed easily on to something else with an authority one could not challenge." Wilson reported that the magazine staff sat in awe of Laski at these dinners; even with his exaggerations they saw him as the keenest intellectual on the left.

Laski had other involvements with THE NEW REPUBLIC, as well. The magazine's legendary, anonymous TRB, whose commentary has graced its pages for years, was Laski's Harvard student, Richard Strout, whom Laski had earlier helped establish in journalism. Dorothy Straight's son, Michael, who ran the magazine from 1946 to 1956, was Laski's student at the LSE in 1934, before his three-year stint at Cambridge, where he became a friend of Philby, Blunt, et al. In 1966 a critical discussion of Laski's political theory appeared in *The Journal of Contemporary History*. "Laski Redivivus" was written by the then-young Harvard scholar Martin Peretz.

THE NEW REPUBLIC has changed in the forty-three years since Laski's death. So too, for that matter, has his beloved Labour party. Both have moved dramatically to the center. Amazingly, however, Laski's ideas about pluralism, first articulated in these pages, live on in the antistatist politics of many progressives in Eastern Europe today. For that, Harold Laski can claim some small credit.

ISAAC KRAMNICK, a professor of government at Cornell, is co-author with Barry Sheerman of *Harold Laski: A Life on the Left* (Allen Lane/The Penguin Press).

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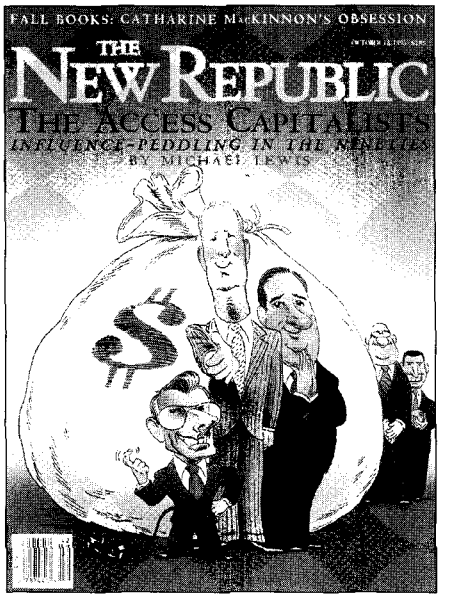

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The threat to Middle East peace.

THE CHEATERS

By Eliot A. Cohen

> Peace, *n.* In international affairs, a period of cheating between two periods of fighting.

Thus the *Devil's Dictionary* of Ambrose Bierce, whose sardonic outlook owed something to his own bloody experiences as a soldier during the Civil War. Such a quotation may seem out of place amid the euphoria that has erupted over the mutual recognition of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. But a moderate dose of Bierceian cynicism will help observers of the Middle East temper their expectations, and put the impending settlement in a strategic context. For this is a peace born of war, and that even may give birth to war again.

The Israeli-PLO agreement, which bypassed the complicated negotiations set in motion by the United States in 1991, demonstrates at least one continuity of the Arab-Israeli conflict: its ability to confound the expectations of those who study it. In the months before the Rabin-Arafat agreement it had become fashionable to expect that an Israeli-Syrian deal would precede any movement on the Palestinian issue. Hafez al Assad could control his government, after all, and the agreement would focus on territory (Golan Heights) that has less emotional significance to Israel than Judaea and Samaria. Observers calculated that the Palestinians would not accept autonomy for Gaza first, since control of that wretched, overpopulated strip of desert promises to bring little but heartache to those who would rule it.

The foundations of peace lie in part in the Gulf war. That conflict shattered the strength of Iraq, whose obduracy affected the policy of crucial states such as Jordan; it showed that the Soviet Union and its successor states neither would nor could serve as the champion of Arab states hostile to Israel; it led the oil kingdoms to break with the PLO, plunging it into a financial crisis of unparalleled severity; it revealed with unmistakable clarity the gap between a first-rank, Western-style military and an apparently well-armed second-rank Middle Eastern state. This last point was particularly important, for the kinds of conventional military power that Israel has vis à vis its neighbors compare with that the United States brought to bear against Iraq.

Israel's conventional military superiority over its neighbors, which is far greater than ever before, gave the Jewish state the self-confidence to contemplate so risky a maneuver as the beginnings of a Palestinian state. Modern conventional warfare, and in particular the ascendancy of air power (including aircraft, helicopters, unmanned vehicles and various forms of missiles), plays to Israeli strengths. The rising importance of information acquired and processed electronically and disseminated automatically, further improves the Israeli position, because modern warfare turns increasingly on a struggle to acquire and use information, and to deny the same to the enemy.

Furthermore, the tactical and organizational quality of the Israel Defense Forces, and not merely its arsenal of weapons, has continued to improve over the years. Ironically, nothing demonstrates this so much as the Israeli record in coping with the Palestinian uprising since 1987. The Intifada does not, on the face of it, look like much of a victory for either side. Certainly, it wearied the Israelis of occupying a large Palestinian population that resented their rule and struggled against it. Yet the IDF's performance has been remarkably good: it achieved its objective of containing the violence (it could not hope to suppress it altogether) while operating reasonably close to the standards of humanity required by Israeli law and conscience.

The IDF might have done worse. Urban guerrilla warfare usually breeds the utmost in savagery, as the experiences of Argentina, Uruguay and earlier the French in Algeria testify. Although the Intifada brought economic misery in its wake, the Palestinians could draw on considerable resources provided by expatriates from the Arab world. Unable and unwilling to resort to real terror, the Israelis confronted a generally youthful population that knew them well and that had thrown off much of its traditional leadership. The Israelis had to suppress an uprising with an army composed largely of trainees and reservists, not the professional force usually considered necessary to police urban uprisings. Furthermore, they had to operate in full view of a large and critical international press corps.

The Palestinian-Israeli agreement might still go sour in years to come. The deepest roots of conflict—Arab rejection of the legitimacy of the Jewish state and Israel's fears for its survival—will surely persist. And the final agreement will not be clear cut. Israel will not, for example, withdraw completely from the West Bank. In 1982 the displacement of 1,400 recently settled Jewish families in the Sinai provoked violent protests and required an expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation. Some of the settlements on the West Bank date back to immediately after the Six Day War, and the region is, in any case, now home to more than 100,000 Jews. A forcible evacuation of these settlements is virtually unthinkable, as is their placement under Palestinian jurisdiction.

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The peace settlement will probably not lead to the creation of a truly sovereign Palestinian state. Israel will not tolerate a Palestinian entity that can arm itself as it pleases, or that could control the water supplies on which its very life depends; it will insist on control of the air space over the West Bank, and on a right of frequent intervention there. Even modest amounts of modern weaponry would give a Palestinian semi-state (or, rather, those within it who wish to return to war with Israel) the tools to revive the struggle in a more deadly fashion than ever before. Equipped with modern surface-to-air missiles, for example, Palestinian air defense forces could make it virtually impossible for the Israeli Air Force to operate over its own air space. Palestinian artillery could put most of Israel's key military bases under attack with little or no warning. Occupying the passes along the spine of the Judean hills, Palestinian soldiers could threaten Israel's north-south communications and Jerusalem. And Israel cannot afford to surrender the line of sight to the east that it needs for its early warning radars and signal intelligence gathering systems in the hills of the West Bank overlooking the Jordan valley.

Even a nominally disarmed Palestinian state will pose new security problems for Israel. From the hills of the West Bank, for example, a mobile surface-to-air missile could bring down airliners descending into Ben Gurion airport. Free from the vigilance of the Israeli secret services, Palestinian terrorists could import and plant increasingly sophisticated mines and bombs that could easily slaughter scores on the roads and in cafés. Such technologies are, of course, available to Palestinians today, but it is difficult for terrorists to operate under the eye of an omnipresent Israeli army and its intelligence services.

And despite the imminence of peace, Palestinian society retains the capability for a great deal of violence. In 1988, the first full year of the Intifada, there were scarcely forty attacks on the authorities using firearms; that number rose steadily to more than 500 in 1992. The murder of Palestinians who collaborate with Israelis has continued—indeed such murders account for almost half of all Palestinian deaths in the Intifada. The killing has recently extended to senior officers from Arafat's Fatah, who support the peace agreement. More than one-half of the deaths in the Israeli army attributable to the Intifada have occurred since the beginning of 1992; only six months ago the Israeli police commissioner urged Israeli Jews who had gun licenses to carry their weapons with them.

The Israeli standoff with the Hezbollah in southern Lebanon this past summer shows just what havoc a band of zealots armed with a few hundred inaccurate but easily transported long-range rockets can wreak. The Israeli counterbombardment killed more than 100 civilians, and drove hundreds of thousands from their homes. A similar series of rocket attacks against the Israeli heartland (easily reachable from the West Bank) could be launched, absent an extremely efficient Palestinian police system. And a similar Israeli response leading to population movements on the same scale could easily shatter the peace.

It is virtually certain that small groups of Palestinians will use their new-found freedom from Israeli occupation to wage war against Israel. Such violence may prove containable by the 25,000-man Palestinian police force under discussion, and by an IDF that will intervene repeatedly to prevent or punish such deeds. But a further problem may come into being in later years. When it becomes clear to Palestinians that they cannot have a real state and that Israel cannot be attacked directly or with impunity, many may look east, in the hopes of gaining in Jordan what they cannot achieve in Gaza or on the West Bank. Should the Hashemite monarchy ever fall, a gelded Palestinian statelet on the West Bank might become the bridgehead for a much larger, and possibly more radical Palestinian state on the east bank of the Jordan. This will further reinforce Israel's claims to a permanent military presence on the West Bank of the Jordan, and for equally permanent and enforceable demilitarization of that area.

Much, then, will hinge on the ability of the Palestinians to police themselves. As a result, Israel and its friends may find themselves in the unpleasant position of backing the PLO—corrupt and internally divided as it is—against portions of the Palestinian people and several Middle Eastern states: Syria, which has not renounced dreams of a greater Syria; Jordan, which must worry about the expansive tendencies of a Palestinian state that will seek compensation in the east for the lands it will never recover in the west; and Iran, which may back Islamic extremists who in turn have hopes of uniting Jordan and Palestine under their rule.

Although Arafat and some of his followers celebrated the agreement as a victory, it represented, in fact, their acceptance of a collapse in PLO fortunes. All that the PLO really gained was the right to administer a sleepy vacation town and one of the world's most turbulent slums. For the PLO's leaders, formal recognition of Israel's legitimacy meant a far greater concession—and far greater personal risks—than did Yitzhak Rabin's meeting with Arafat on the White House lawn. The Palestinian leadership, which Abba Eban once said never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity, accepted a compromise that will abate the war that has raged between Arab and Jew for the better part of a century. To be sure, in the happiest of circumstances the peace that will emerge will be a normal Middle Eastern peace, not the peace of war-weary dreams. It will be a peace that can slide into war, a peace marked by violence and suspicion, an armed peace and a volatile one. But it may be some kind of peace nonetheless, and it is not to be despised for that. •

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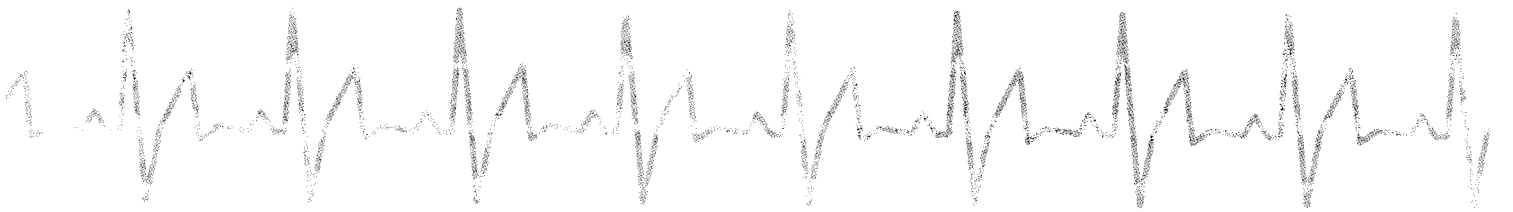

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Against a myriad of misconceptions.

FOR THE CLINTON PLAN

By Paul Starr

Among the obstacles confronting President Clinton's Health Security Plan, none is more serious than the fog of confusion and doubt surrounding how it is financed, how much employers and others may expect to pay and whether Americans will have expanded or reduced choice.

Some of the fog is due to the interests that stand to lose from change and are thus stoking the embers of public anxiety. Insurance brokers oppose reforms that eliminate their role in buying health coverage for small and mid-sized businesses. Insurance companies that sell indemnity policies don't want to confront large regional purchasing alliances that will make it impossible to cherry-pick the healthy. These interests are the unavoidable purveyors of panic in the crowded theater of health care reform. But the bigger problem for the administration is that people who ought to be its supporters, including employers who would benefit substantially, are unsure whether the plan will work and how it will affect them.

Part of the problem here is that those who come out winners—state and local governments, unions, the elderly, manufacturing industries and other employers who now provide generous benefits—continue to raise complaints, because they want more from the plan and believe that those who make the most fuss will get it. But part, too, is the skepticism of a public that distrusts the capacity of government to fix anything, and that does not see exactly how the president's plan can extend coverage to everyone without a big tax increase or how medical costs can be controlled without sacrificing quality. In a recent editorial ("Free-Lunch Clintonism," the Editors, November 8), THE NEW REPUBLIC expressed some of this skepticism, accusing the administration of making the numbers work only through the unrealistic assumption of $200 billion a year in savings. As one of those who helped develop the plan, I am only too aware of how its breadth and intricacy have contributed to skepticism. But the plan the president has put forward presumes neither a free lunch nor any fiscal fantasies. There are, put simply, three sources for the revenue to finance universal coverage: first, the requirement that employers, employees and other individuals pay health insurance premiums; second, reductions in the growth of other federal health programs; and third, new revenue from tobacco taxes and an assessment on corporations that remain outside the regional health alliances.

In 1994, $200 billion a year in savings would represent more than 20 percent of national health expenditures. Even though some experts have suggested there is that much excess and inefficiency in the system, the president's plan does not assume achieving anywhere near that level of savings.

As states carry out reform beginning in 1996, expanded coverage will raise spending by about 8 percent, while other reforms aimed at stimulating cost-conscious choice, backed up by a regional cap on premium increases, will cut the rate of increase in per capita costs. Initially, the effect of expanded coverage will predominate. The administration projects, however, that by the year 2000 national health expenditures will be about 1 percent of GDP less than under current policies.

The very concept of "savings" may easily be misunderstood. The administration does not assume any reduction in spending from current levels. Under its plan, national health expenditures will rise from 14 percent of GDP this year to 17 percent by 2000. Considering that the average in industrialized countries is 7.9 percent and growing much more slowly than in the United States, 17 percent is hardly austere. We will have "savings" only because current policies, according to the Congressional Budget Office, will lead U.S. health spending to rise to more than 18 percent of GDP by 2000 if we do nothing.

Perhaps one reason for the confusion about how universal coverage is financed and how savings fit in is a mix-up between private and public costs. Premiums for private health insurance are not counted as taxes today and, in the administration's view, should not count as taxes—even if employers are required to pay for coverage, as drivers are required to pay for auto insurance. Consequently, charts displaying governmental costs and sources of funds do not show the new revenue for health care from the employer mandate, and many people are left wondering where the money is coming from to pay for the uninsured.

A second problem arises from the administration's strategic decision to finance new federal costs primarily out of redirected growth in other programs—a natural

PAUL STARR, professor of sociology at Princeton, advised the White House on the health care plan.

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TOP 10 REASONS...

WHY AMERICANS WILL HAVE MORE CHOICE OF HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS UNDER MARKET BASED MANAGED COMPETITION.

10.

Americans ***will*** be able to change providers within their plan.

9.

Americans ***will*** be able to switch plans.

8.

Americans ***will*** be able to seek providers outside their plans.

7.

Americans ***will*** be able choose from a menu of plans.

6.

Americans ***will*** be able to have a "primary care physician" who will advise them about the selection of other providers within their plan.

5.

Americans will have ***real information*** — a report card — about "patient satisfaction" concerning providers within their plan.

4.

Americans will have ***real information*** — a report card — about costs when they choose a plan.

3.

Americans will have ***real information*** — a report card — about the success of medical treatments when they choose a plan.

2.

Americans will ***no longer*** have to choose health care providers out of a phone book.

1.

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corollary of its efforts to contain health costs. The plan would be far easier to understand (but impossible to enact) if it raised taxes to pay for all new expenditures. Instead, the president proposes reducing other expenditures, as conservatives have long suggested. It is a great irony that the critics—often the same people who say that the employer mandate is a tax—accuse the president of wimping out by not facing up to the need for tax increases.

Because health spending is on a sharp upward trajectory, higher costs are already assumed in forecasts for current federal programs, now growing at three times the rate of inflation. The administration proposes changes to reduce growth to twice the rate of inflation. From the difference comes the money to finance new expenditures, plus some deficit reduction.

There is nothing inevitable about baselines—the projections of spending based on current law and current trends. If the baseline projections for national health expenditures were fated to come true, Americans would devote half the GDP to health care sometime in the next century. On the same reasoning, an adolescent might be projected to grow to the size of a two-story house at 50 years of age.

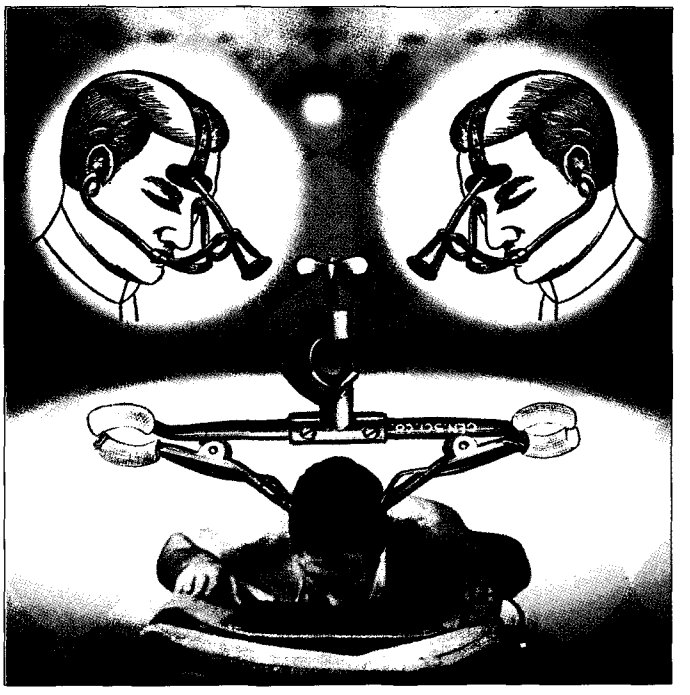

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN BORRUSO FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

In another recent issue of THE NEW REPUBLIC, William J. Baumol argues that the United States can afford to spend an ever-increasing percentage of GDP on health care ("Do Health Care Costs Matter?" November 22). Perhaps we can afford it, but the question is whether we should. Health care now costs Americans almost twice as much as Germans and other Europeans, and the divergence has been growing. Yet there is much evidence that Americans are not getting good value for their money. The health system is rife with distorted incentives, excess capacity, misallocated resources. Models at home and abroad show it is possible to do better.

Some of the increase in U.S. health care costs is due to Baumol's famous "cost disease," but it is not clear how much. In 1970, the United States spent the same proportion of GDP on education and health care. Both are subject to the same problems of relatively slow growth in productivity. Today, however, the share of GDP going to education has hardly changed, while the proportion spent on health care has doubled. In fact, since 1980 health care has been gobbling up an additional 1 percent of GDP every thirty-five months, devastating real wage increases and crowding out public expenditures for other purposes—like education.

The level of health spending in the United States is an anomaly among advanced countries; it is far higher than would be predicted by per capita income. The growth rate must drop; the question is when and how fast. Here lies yet another source of confusion that concerns the speed of change in the underlying rate of increase in health costs—that is, the growth rate apart from one-time historical shifts in the level of expenditures.

When the president's plan first leaked in September, critics questioned the administration's projection that annual per capita growth in health expenditures would be cut roughly in half beginning in 1996, as the purchasing alliances are established and become subject to caps on increases in their average premiums. To cut the underlying rate of growth so quickly would be extremely difficult, but this is not what the administration's plan supposes. The reforms will bring about a number of "one-time" savings, reducing the level of expenditures. Lower administrative costs will result from consolidation of the individual and small-group insurance markets, uniform rules regarding coverage, a uniform claims form and automated processing of transactions. Perhaps most important, in response to the incentives for cost-conscious choice of a health plan, many consumers are likely to switch out of high-cost plans into plans at the average or below, thereby reducing average premiums and intensifying pressures on all plans to restrain inappropriate care and to negotiate more aggressively with their suppliers.

The stimulus to competition will have a continuing impact on the growth rate. Even the "one-time" savings will not actually happen at one time; they will be spread over the first several years after reform, cutting the growth in per capita costs. It is the combined impact of the one-time savings and continuing cost pressures that is the basis for capping growth in average premiums at levels approaching the general inflation rate between 1996 and 2000. The plan leaves the growth rate beyond 2000 open for revision, but assumes it would be somewhat higher for the very reasons that Baumol has identified. (Indeed, his criticism resulted in that policy.)

Some critics say that rather than rely on competition among health plans and a cap on average premiums in the alliances, health care reform should lay out criteria for rationing—that is, withholding beneficial care. But I cannot imagine why we would want the federal govern-

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ment to write clinical priorities into law or regulation. The value of treatment changes with the latest research; regulations would tend to freeze clinical judgments. Moreover, the benefit of treatment varies according to criteria, such as a patient's overall prognosis, that cannot easily be captured by the kind of ranking of treatments that Oregon sought for its Medicaid program. It is far better to keep the government out of the microregulation of clinical decisions and instead restructure both markets and regulation to oblige health plans to keep their expenditures under an overall limit. That approach allows the plans more flexibility in controlling costs and permits them to achieve a target through better management, including the reduction of inappropriate care, rather than by imposing rigid rules restricting beneficial care.

The health alliances are another rich source of exaggerated fears—supposedly another layer of bureaucracy, stifling choice. The alliances, however, assume the purchasing functions now performed by benefits managers, brokers and other intermediaries. They *subtract* more administrative costs than they add. Today, the administrative costs of insurance for individuals and the smallest firms run forty cents on the premium dollar. The costs diminish the larger the size of the firm. By combining small firms and eliminating functions like underwriting, the alliances will give small and midsize employee groups access to economies of scale and greater purchasing power. Most important, they will shift the choice of a health plan from employers to consumers. But the alliances will work only if they encompass a broad base of the population and employer participation is required. If employers can decide whether to join, insurers will continue to cherry-pick, and the alliances will become high-risk pools.

The irony is that the measures advocated by conservatives—smaller, voluntary alliances with no employer mandate—will actually raise costs, sabotage real competition and increase administrative burdens. Attracting higher-risk groups, voluntary alliances will have higher premiums as well as marketing costs that an employer mandate obviates. They will also be forced to spread their overhead over a smaller population. Without an employer mandate, moreover, there will be lower rates of compliance in paying premiums. And the individual mandate advocated by some Republicans will actually require subsidies to more families, since they won't have the 80 percent share contributed by employers.

Most media reports say that the alliances will give consumers a choice of three plans. What they mean is three types of plans: fee-for-service, HMO and provider networks. In fact, the alliances are required to offer all plans that meet the terms of participation, and at least one of those must be a traditional fee-for-service plan. Alliances can exclude a health plan only if it does not observe the rules for fair insurance practices, discriminates, fails to provide the benefits or flunks a state's minimum quality standards. In addition, if a plan's bid exceeds the average premium by more than 20 percent, alliances would not be required to offer it—a provision aimed at giving alliances bargaining leverage with high-cost plans.

Some commentators have mistakenly assumed that this latter provision would restrict plans with more generous benefits. However, supplementary benefits are not counted toward the average alliance premium that is subject to the caps. The basis for determining whether a plan is more than 20 percent above the average is its premium for the standard benefit package.

Media reports also assume that fee-for-service plans will necessarily be the plans with the highest premiums. But because of the provisions for higher cost-sharing under fee-for-service and the ability of alliances to negotiate fee-for-service provider rates, it is not clear that this will be so. When out-of-pocket costs are taken into account, fee-for-service is likely to be the most expensive, but the premiums may not be higher.

One of the most common misconceptions about the president's plan is due to the shorthand used by the administration to explain employer contributions. The capsule explanation that employers pay 80 percent of the average premium seems to have misled many in the business community into overestimating their obligations. Employers collectively do pay 80 percent, but an individual firm pays 80 percent of average premiums only for single workers. If every employer paid 80 percent of the premium for workers with families, alliances would collect too much money, because many families have more than one worker. So to calculate what individual employers owe, the alliances will divide the family premium by the average number of workers per family in a region. Since the average is 1.4 nationally, the average employer will actually owe only 57 percent of the premium for employees with families.

On hearing this explanation, a representative of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which supports a mandate for 50 percent of the premium, said in surprise that the Chamber and the administration were closer than he had realized. I am not sure there is any real gap at all, since employers who now insure will save an additional 10 percent off their current premiums because of the reduction of uncompensated care—the cost of unpaid medical bills now left by the uninsured but covered under reform. In addition, many firms will see reduced costs because of the alliances' coverage of retiree benefits, reductions in workers' compensation costs and the caps on employer contributions that limit their obligations for health insurance to 7.9 percent of payroll (with steeper discounts to small firms based on average wage levels).

There is one benefit to misperception. The administration can "compromise" by requiring employers to pay only 57 percent of family premiums, allowing alliances to offer an unlimited number of plans, excluding supplementary benefits from the premium caps and imposing caps only in areas without "effective" competition. Such compromises would not represent any change, but who said we shouldn't cover cosmetic surgery? It may help avoid amputations. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

An Elegy

Anthony Hopkins is the center of **The Remains of the Day** (Columbia)—more specifically, Hopkins's body. After an introductory sequence that takes us up a driveway to palatial Darlington Hall in Oxfordshire, where an auction is being conducted in a tent on the lawn, the picture proper begins with Hopkins, as Stevens the butler, opening some shutters. His tempo of movement, the pitch of his body, the set of his head, the fact that—apparently just by thinking it—he has enlarged his jaw to suggest a touch of the bulldog, these things announce that a character has been created and that we are in for exceptional acting.

Nowadays we hear a good deal about body language, particularly in connection with so-called performance artists. Good for them. But, for actors, body language has been around for a while: Jack Nicholson in *Hoffa* and Vanessa Redgrave in *Howards End* are only two recent examples. Quite clearly, Hopkins decided that the man who led Stevens's life would manifest it physically, kinetically. He bears himself like the legatee of a line of butlers with the charge of passing on the legacy.

From this conception, the rest follows inevitably, if you're Hopkins. The precision of his speech conveys that he is a man who has learned to speak well without any substantial education behind him. (His father, whom we meet in the course of things, has a working-class accent.) The time is 1958, the "present" of the film; and he gives us a man who has aged somewhat but is still perfectly competent, grown from the Stevens before World War II whom we soon see. We quickly feel that the Hall would seem empty without him. In short, Hopkins *is* the film. Excellent though it is in many ways, it would come to little without his performance.

The screenplay readjusts some of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel, not to its advantage. As is widely known, a screenplay by Harold Pinter was discarded in favor of one by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, the usual writer for this director, James Ivory, and his producer, Ismail Merchant. It's conceivable that Pinter wanted to stick closer to the book; his previous adaptations suggest this. Jhabvala is certainly no crude hack, but she has underscored some matters and has altered the tone of the original.

The story interweaves the "present" with doings in Darlington Hall in the 1930s. From Stevens, moving through both time planes, we get a personification of Britain slipping fatefully into World War II and struggling for balance thereafter. Stevens is devoted to his master, Lord Darlington, a well-meaning but fuzzy-minded aristo who, in the 1930s, thinks he is working to avoid war and who invites high figures in various governments to convene in his house. (The suggestions of the notorious Cliveden set are clear.) Stevens feels honored to be serving a man who is involved in great events and who intends well for his country. Stevens's blind trust is meant as nationally symbolic.

Also running through the pre-war and postwar years are his relations with the housekeeper, Miss Kenton, whom we first see in her early 30s. They have occasional disagreements, yet he respects her professionalism. On his part, it's no more than that. He never acknowledges that her response may be otherwise.

Both the political element and the personal element are subtly drawn in the book, but Jhabvala italicizes much of the subtlety. On the political side there is an encounter with a doctor in the postwar years that pounds a point to pieces. Stevens has taken a holiday, as urged by his new American employer (Darlington has died), and has borrowed a car. He goes to visit Miss Kenton, long departed from the Hall, who now lives in the west country. En route he meets a doctor who—in the film, not the book—harries Stevens about his tacit collaboration in the allegedly treacherous activities at Darlington Hall before the war until Stevens evades and lies a bit. This changes Stevens from a man armored in loyalty to a shifty time-server, and it's done just to make sure the audience understands that the film's political heart is in the right place.

Stevens's relationship with Miss Kenton is as it was in the book, but the film's treatment of it is more sentimental. When they are in service together, she has a rather reticent crush on him, but the film underscores it. In the "present," as he drives to meet her in his employer's car (a Daimler, not the novel's Ford); as we learn that she has been married, has a daughter and is now separated from her husband; we suspect that a romance may be belatedly ful-

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Flight of the Innocent. *Italian, somewhat fancily treated, but basically gripping. A 10-year-old Calabrian boy, child of kidnappers, gets entangled in the ransoming of a 10-year-old Siennese boy. (Reviewed 11/15/93)* **It's All True.** *Another remnant of Orson Welles's boisterous, gifted, unfulfilled life. A documentary about an unfinished documentary. Sad but essential viewing. (11/15/93)* **A Streetcar Named Desire.** *Reissued with a bit of previously censored footage. Williams's masterpiece is bruised in screen adaptation, but Brando's performance remains titanic. (11/29/93)* **The War Room.** *Crackling documentary about the Clinton presidential campaign, "starring" James Carville and George Stephanopoulos. Disquietingly informative. (11/22/93)* **—SK**

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filled. No such thing happens. When he and Miss Kenton part after a mild afternoon together, he puts her on a bus, then notices that she is crying. That's all—in the novel. The film holds on her face as she rides away in tears, her last chance with him fading away.

This shot ruptures the first-person perspective of Stevens (not for the first time, either) that is essential to the work. That perspective is not merely a literary device that could be discarded in the film. Ishiguro's aim was to show a man so encapsulated in protocols that all the major events of his life, political and emotional, happen on the periphery of that life. *We* see, through his eyes, more clearly than he does what is happening around him. Ishiguro means this, I believe, as a comment on England. The film fractures his intent.

The argument presumably is that the fracturing needed to be done in order to make the novel into a film. This argument can be doubted; in any case, what is not arguable is that, to Ishiguro's exquisitely poised work, Jhabvala has painted on colors of *Upstairs, Downstairs*.

Let's add very quickly that, whatever the screenplay's flaws, it is filmed superbly. James Ivory showed in *Howards End* that he is no longer (the British jibe) a Laura Ashley director, chiefly interested in décor. Ivory does equally well in *The Remains of the Day*. Darlington Hall—actually several stately homes were used—is treated as Stevens might have treated it: majestic, venerable, but the place where he works.

Emma Thompson, on whom be peace, is Miss Kenton, gently exact in her blend of professional pride and personal desperation. She is lesser in the story than Hopkins, but she certainly helps to keep the fabric whole. Her best scene is one in a pub with the man she determines to marry. But I must note that this scene, too, is an insertion in the original, as are others of her scenes. Again the argument, I suppose, is for heightened dramatization; again, it is done at the expense of the poignantly enclosed feeling of the novel.

James Fox plays Darlington with the right tweedy ease, warm but dim. Christopher Reeves plays a "collapsed" part; the American congressman who attends a Darlington Hall conference before the war is here combined with the postwar American who buys the Hall. Poor Reeves. He's so big and so conventionally handsome that, though he is serious, it's hard to take him seriously.

Elegy is the key term for this work, from the title onward. In the film version, the explicit touches don't help; but because of Ivory and Hopkins and their colleagues, much of it has melancholy beauty. •

Jorge G. Castañeda

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The fantastic life and oracular work of Philip K. Dick.

The God in the Trash

BY ALEXANDER STAR

I.

Eleven years after his removal to a Colorado graveyard, Philip K. Dick is among the busiest of American writers. New novels arrive regularly from the tomb; box office smashes (*Total Recall*) and Hollywood classics (*Blade Runner*) are spliced from his work; young writers of diverse persuasions sit raptly at his icy feet. A science fiction journeyman, ardent bohemian and restless observer of suburban life, Dick never discovered a place for himself while he lived. He was dismissed as a crackpot and hailed as a "visionary among charlatans"; and like most visionaries, he had a hard time finding a publisher. Today his published work could fill a small bookstore.

To enter a novel by Philip K. Dick is to enter a zone of disappearing worlds, nested hallucinations and impossible time-loops. This domain is inhabited by lonely repairmen, egotistical entrepreneurs and hapless housewives, and strewn with slant humor and menacing paradox. Although the books vary, their inspiration is always the same: they are governed by a passionate apprehension of appearances. Few writers have ever been so distrustful of the phenomenal world. Dick's characters are driven to doubt their environment, and their environment is driven with an equal and opposite force to doubt them. There is always some primal error in Dick's fictions, something "out of joint," and the location of that error—inside the individual or outside the individual—can never be decided upon. Dick systematically blurs the boundaries between mind and matter, between storms in the psyche and crises of the atmosphere. The coiling search to set things right is doubled and redoubled and doubled again. Dick never met a story that ended or a regression that was finite.

Although he is still pigeonholed as a writer of science fiction, Dick had little respect for the prestige of science, and even less for the dignity of fiction, to which it must be said he contributed very little. His interest in hard and applied science was minimal, extending not far beyond a persistent (and unhappy) acquaintance with the details of automobile repair. His maddeningly profuse plots make a mockery of the notion that the novel can be a stable and self-sustaining work of art. And yet, all this notwithstanding, Dick's novels demand attention. They intrude extreme experiences into everyday scenarios with compassion, humor and poise. He is both lucid and strange, practical and paranoid. ("By their fruits ye shall know them, and their fruits are that they communicate by radio.") There is nothing merely willful or notional in the bizarre aspects of Dick's work.

Eye in the Sky
by Philip K. Dick
(Collier, 243 pp., $9 paper)

Time Out of Joint
by Philip K. Dick
(Carroll & Graf, 263 pp., $3.95 paper)

The Man in the High Castle
by Philip K. Dick
(Vintage, 259 pp., $10 paper)

The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch
by Philip K. Dick
(Vintage, 230 pp., $10 paper)

Ubik
by Philip K. Dick
(Vintage, 216 pp., $10 paper)

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?
by Philip K. Dick
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A Scanner Darkly
by Philip K. Dick
(Vintage. 278 pp., $10 paper)

Valis
by Philip K. Dick
(Vintage, 256 pp., $10 paper)

The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick
(Citadel Press, 5 volumes, $12.95 each)

In Pursuit of Valis: Selections from the Exegesis
edited by Lawrence Sutin
(Underwood-Miller, 278 pp., $14.95 paper)

Divine Invasions: The Life of Philip K. Dick
by Lawrence Sutin
(Citadel Press, 352 pp., $12.95 paper)

On Philip K. Dick: 40 Articles from 'Science-Fiction Studies'
edited by R. D. Mullen et al.
(SF-TH Inc., 290 pp., $24.95, $14.95 paper)

As an experimental writer of the 1950s and '60s, Dick belongs in the company of William Burroughs, J. G. Ballard and Thomas Pynchon. His novels recall Burroughs's pitiless cycles of addiction and schizophrenia and Ballard's eroticized landscapes of celebrity and death. What he lacks of Ballard's unnerving coolness and Burroughs's deadpan swagger, he makes up for with a compassion that is quite alien to them. His most esoteric dismantlings of reality still insist on the need for human empathy; and they do so with an alertness to the serious obstacles that empathy must sometimes encounter. Like Burroughs, his clipped prose wittily recycles the clichés of advertising lingo ("Emigrate or Degenerate: The Choice is Yours") and pulp writing ("You're a successful man, Mr. Poole. But, Mr. Poole, you're not a man. You're an electric ant"). Sometimes it reaches a higher level of eloquence. In his later years, as he came to believe that the revelations of a medieval rabbi were reaching him through occult channels, Dick's sanity was open to question. But throughout his career he wrote with qualities that are rare in a science fiction writer, or in any writer at all. These included a sure feel for the detritus and debris, the obsolescent object-world, of postwar suburbia; a sharp historical wit; and a searching moral subtlety and concern.

II.

A heavy man with an absent smile and an intent gaze, Philip Dick typed 120 words a minute even when he wasn't on speed, drank prodigious quantities of scotch and completed five marriages and over fifty novels before the pills and the liquor conspired to kill him at 54. His busy life has been ably

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narrated by Lawrence Sutin in his biography, *Divine Invasions*, which appeared a few years ago. Born in 1928, Dick witnessed the Depression from inside a broken home. His father, an employee of the Department of Agriculture, left the family in 1931 and went on to host a radio show in Los Angeles called "This is Your Government." Dick grew up with his mother on the fringes of Berkeley's fledgling bohemia. A troubled student, he was often "hypochondriacal about his mental condition," as one of his wives later put it. And like many troubled boys of the time, he became a voracious reader of the science fiction pulp magazines that were then at their peak. In *Confessions of a Crap Artist*, a novel written in 1959, he wryly portrayed himself as an awkward kid spouting oddball ideas from *Popular Mechanics* and adventure stores: "Even to look at me you'd recognize that my main energies are in the mind."

Dick evidently had few friends until he went to work at a record store in Berkeley, where he acquired an encyclopedic knowledge of classical music and the friendship of customers and colleagues. "Art Music" was also a site of romance. The employees, university dropouts with time to spare, courted their customers with cunning; after impressing one frequent browser with his musical expertise, Dick married her. Not long after the wedding they quarreled, and the bride's brother threatened to smash his precious record collection. A divorce followed; of his five marriages, it was the shortest.

In 1947, Dick moved into a Berkeley rooming house, living for a short time with the poet Robert Duncan. After one unhappy term at Berkeley in 1949, he married again and settled down to a writing career, publishing his first science fiction stories in 1952. Dick entered the market at a time when the genre was in flux. Like the big bands, the great pulp magazines of the '30s declined after the war. They were replaced by a flood of cheap paperbacks, and the leading format for science fiction became the "double paperback" published by Ace Books, two novels together in one binding with a different lurid cover illustration on each side. Throughout the '50s Dick worked closely with Ace's top editor, Don Wollheim. Typing from morning to night, he cranked out large quantities of prose, and turned himself into a typically prolific and typically uneven writer of the genre.

Dick was not unsuccessful at this: his novel *Solar Lottery*, published in 1955, sold 300,000 copies, and he became one

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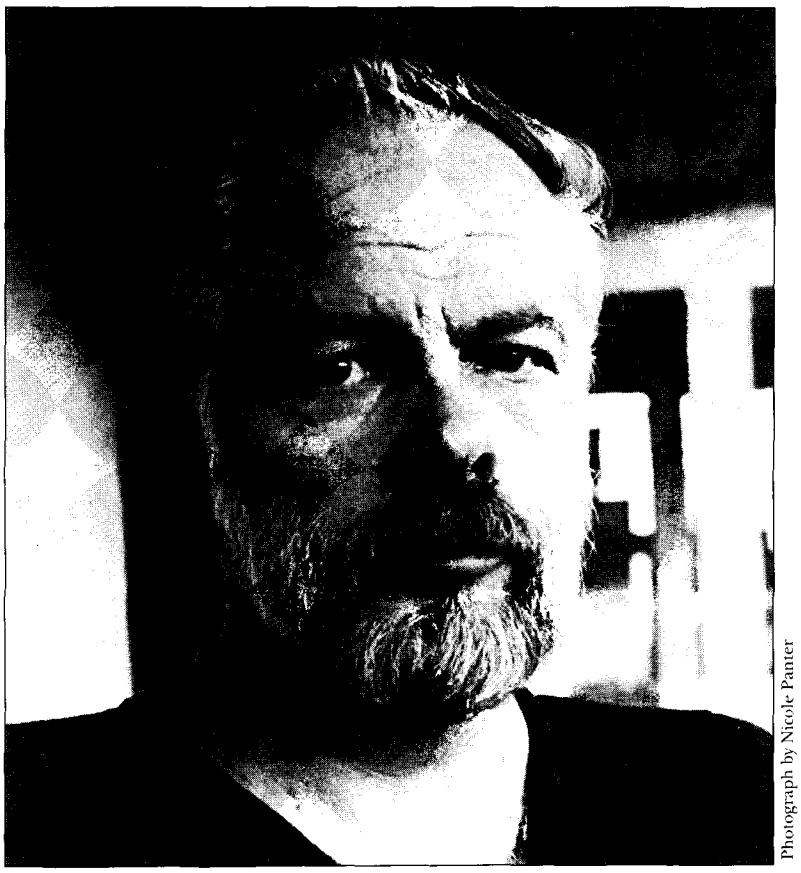
of the first clients of the powerful agent Scott Meredith. Still, it was not a writer's life; royalties were meager and manuscripts were altered at will to ensure the proper amount of extraterrestrial warfare and gee-whiz gadgetry. (*The Zap Gun* was written because Wollheim insisted on publishing a book with that title.) As he read widely Dick's frustrations with science fiction grew, and his discontent became apparent.

Throughout his career Dick longed for a wider audience, and sought to escape the science fiction ghetto. He envied writers such as Ursula Le Guin, who acquired a serious reputation and was even published in *The New Yorker*. His readers, he complained, were "trolls and wackos." In the '50s and early '60s, he wrote a series of non-science fiction novels, all of which were rejected by publishers at the time. These books were mainly somber tales of thwarted love in northern California, peopled with cranky record salesmen and bitter couples and narrated in a glumly painstaking fashion. On the whole, their vision of domestic life is an unhappy one. In *Confessions of a Crap Artist*, an accumulation of errant jealousies and petty insults leads to illness and insanity. The novel ridicules the newly formed UFO cults of Marin County, though years later Dick reflected that the cults "didn't seem as crazy to me now . . . "

Rebuffed by "mainstream" publishers, Dick abandoned his realist writings in 1963. By then he had discovered a different way out of the Ace formula: he would transform the genre of science fiction from within. Concerned with psychic dislocation, and its moral and philosophical consequences, he began to ignore the expectations of his editors. In particular, he disregarded the most honored conventions of "hard S.F.," that science fiction should be rigorously "extrapolative" of hard science, and that it should be "prophetic" of plausible futures.

By the late '50s, these conventions had a long and venerable history. When Hugo Gernsback started his magazine *Amazing Stories* in 1926, initiating modern science fiction, he hired Thomas Edison's son-in-law as a fact checker. In its heyday, John W. Campbell Jr.'s *Astounding Stories* insisted that writers postulate one outlandish circumstance—the "what if?" clause—and rigorously follow the laws of science from there. After World War II these conventions loosened, as the optimistic narrative of invention and discovery was tempered by dystopian broodings and doubts about the authority and integrity of science. But the most important figures, Asimov, Heinlen, Bradbury, remained faithful to the Campbellian requirements of scientific accuracy and plausible prophecy. As Asimov put it, "In my stories I always suppose a sane world."



Photograph by Nicole Panter

PHILIP K. DICK

Philip Dick's fictional worlds have a great many attributes, but sanity is not among them. Campbell, the monarch of postwar science fiction, refused to publish his stories because they were "too neurotic." In his preoccupation with abnormal psychology, collective delusions and implanted memories, Dick in part followed the path of irregular science fiction writers of the '50s such as A. E. van Vogt and Theodore Sturgeon. Yet he ranged further in his subversions. Dick continued to rely on the ready-made materials of science fiction, the pulp prose, the planetary conflicts, the "psionic" powers of "precogs" (who read the future) and "telepaths" (who read minds); but he employed these materials to his own extravagant ends.

Dick's novels of the late '50s were littered with intellectual debris of the period: the existential psychoanalysis of Ludwig Binswanger, popularized in America by Rollo May; the cybernetics of Norbert Weiner and the game theory of John von Neumann; gestalt psychology and Carl Jung; Tibetan Buddhism and the I Ching. *Eye in the Sky* (1957) amusingly presents a nation given over to ostentatious piety and soulless technocracy. Its engineers stabilize "reservoirs of grace" while "consulting semanticians" secure communication lines with God and IBM computers tabulate credits toward salvation. (The satire of religious fundamentalism worried Dick's editors at Ace, who changed a central character into a Muslim to avoid offending readers.)

Time Out of Joint, which appeared in 1959, departed even further from the norms of science fiction. Its first hundred pages unfold a slow-paced story set in a small west coast town. Evidence that something is "out of joint" gradually amasses, until the startling scene when a soft-drink stand vanishes into a strip of paper labeled "SOFT-DRINK STAND" and the entire community is revealed to be a Potemkin village; it is, in fact, an artificial replica of the '50s constructed in 1994 to salve the nerves of the protagonist, whose sanity is essential to national security. In 1959 Dick was already proposing that the '50s themselves were a kind of pacifying fantasy available for the nostalgia of future generations. Where traditional science fiction stirred anxieties about the future, Dick deftly introduced his uncertainties into the present and recent past. Despite the concluding narrative fireworks, Ace refused to publish *Time Out of Joint*, and Doubleday brought it out instead as a "novel of menace."

Dick's biggest literary advance came in 1962, when he published *The Man in the High Castle*. This study of an alternate universe in which the Axis won the Second World War was entirely devoid of the usual sci-fi devices. ("No science in it," a character observes. "Nor set in future.") Mr. Tagomi, a Japanese bureau-

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crat and connoisseur of American antiques, is one of Dick's most sympathetic characters. Repelled by international intrigue and devoted to the occult beauty of old bottle caps and cheap jewelry, he resists Nazi brutality with a fragile but steady will. After Bormann dies, a power struggle breaks out among the remaining Nazi leaders (Hitler has long since entered a sanitarium) and Tagomi unhappily plays one faction off against another, aware that they are all unspeakably evil. Ingeniously, the book contains its own counterfiction: in this America divided into German and Japanese zones, rumors spread of an incendiary novel speculating that the allies actually *won* the war. The narrative adroitly maneuvers back and forth between these two competing accounts of what is real. *The Man in the High Castle* was Dick's most assured and subtle work, and he hoped it would win him a wider audience. He was chagrined when reviewers treated it as just another thriller. Ironically, it was the science fiction community that celebrated the book, bestowing the Hugo Award on it in 1963.

Fueled by marital troubles, esoteric visions and an epic diet of speed and scotch, Dick composed eleven novels in a hectic two-year period. *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1964) and *Ubik*, written in 1966, are his '60s classics, his wildest experiments in the manufacture and management of chaos. These are not Dick's most accessible or likeable books, but they are his tours de force. (Both are among the dozen titles by Dick that Vintage Books has happily reissued over the past three years.) The time-loops and the conspiracies, the conflicts between frail human subjects and large unsettling forces, the disorientations of perspective: all of these devices are brought to new levels of complexity and compression.

In 1963, Philip Dick experienced the first of a number of "visions" that were to augment and to anguish his life. Depressed by a failing marriage and troubled by memories of his father's wartime gas mask, Dick reported that he saw "a vast visage of evil" in the sky. It had "empty slots for eyes, metal and cruel, and worst of all, it was god." Out of this emerged the demiurgic figure of Palmer Eldritch in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, an interstellar drug lord luring his customers and competitors into a "negative trinity" of "alienation, blurred reality and despair." Eldritch's powers are not absolute, but they are sufficient to rob other characters of confidence in their reality and in themselves. "We see into his eyes," they fret, "and we see out of his eyes." In a typical conundrum, the protagonist, Leo Bulero, finds himself stranded in a blurred landscape, a "plain of dead things," unable to know whether he is still in the grip of one of Eldritch's hallucinations or whether he has returned to his original "reality." He meets two men, shakes their hands and watches his fingers slip through theirs. He would assume that they are phantasms but they assume, just as reasonably, that he is a phantasm; and he concedes that they might be right. In the realm of the "irreal," as Dick called it, to doubt the solidity of one's surroundings is to doubt the solidity of oneself.

In *Palmer Eldritch* Dick perfected one of his "irreal" themes, the nested hallucination. In *Ubik* he perfected another, the experience of entropy, the onset of "decay, deterioration and destruction." Imprisoned in a purgatorial "half-life," the paralyzed characters of *Ubik* witness the spread of a cataclysmic force, a mass "reversion of matter" that causes objects to revert to prior forms of themselves: televisions become radios, spray cans turn into jars of ointment. They struggle with their "obsessive fears that the entire world is turning into clotted milk" and "worn-out tape recorders," that "all the cigarettes in the world are stale." Stranded in his apartment, the central

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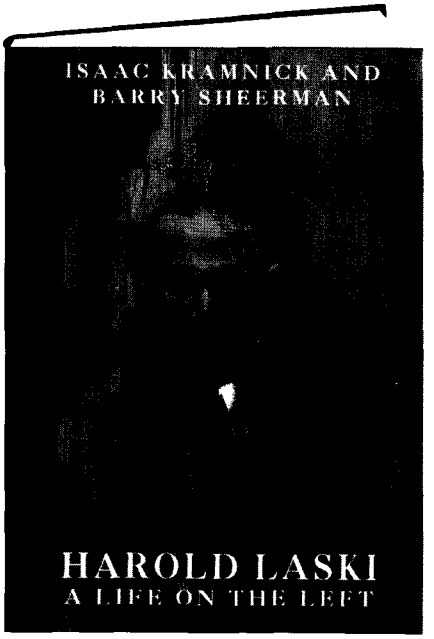
HAROLD LASKI
A LIFE ON THE LEFT

by Isaac Kramnick and Barry Sheerman



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character resignedly watches his sleek, modern elevator become a creaky and dangerous relic. *Ubik* is a comedy of enforced obsolescence; the most familiar things acquire an unruly resonance as they confront their own historicity.

These two novels established Dick's reputation as a master of experimental science fiction. *Ubik* inspired his election in Europe to the Collège du Pataphysique, a kind of Acadèmie Française for Dadaists, and John Lennon expressed an interest in producing a film of *Palmer Eldritch*. "New wave" science fiction writers of the late '60s, led by Harlan Ellison, regarded him as a godfather. But Dick, as usual, received few financial rewards. The middle-aged pataphysician found himself living on welfare in a "run down, rubble-filled" house in Santa Venetia, a notorious crash-pad for dealers and runaways.

Squabbling with girlfriends, fearing the FBI and the IRS, Dick succumbed to serious bouts of paranoia and unease. (His paranoia was not entirely without foundation: in 1957 the CIA had in fact intercepted a letter that he had sent to a Soviet physicist. Fortunately he never knew of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare's intention to compile a bibliography of drug-related science fiction.) In 1971 Dick's stability declined further when someone broke into his home and looted his papers. He devoted countless hours of speculation to the identity of the burglars. It was his own private Watergate. At various times he suspected the FBI, the Black Panthers, a gang of local drug dealers, right-wing militiamen and himself. He retrieved one tentative lesson from the debacle: "At least I'm not paranoid."

Dick's writing of this period trembles with fear of a totalitarian "betrayal state" of advanced surveillance and narcotic intrigue. His novels envisage a burned-out post-'60s nation headed into a dark age of police repression and entertainment-enforced normality. In *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said* (1974), the authorities deploy an arsenal of bugs, sensors, minicams and tattoos to solve the mystery of a man who thinks that he is a television talk show host even though no one has heard of him. *A Scanner Darkly* (1977) sympathetically observes the unraveling of Bob Arctor, an undercover cop in a Los Angeles police state where "straights" and addicts inhabit segregated areas and where access to shopping malls is restricted to those with the correct credit cards. Arctor slowly becomes unhinged as he is forced to narc on himself. Witnessing his friends' fuzzy chatter ("Bob, you know something ... I used to be the same age as everyone else") and acute distress, he worries that "the same murk covers me." Eventually it does; his brain splits into two distinct identities, his thinking comes to a halt and he becomes dead to the world: "His circuits welded shut." With its well-scored drug talk and its terrible portrait of a mind becoming opaque to itself, *A Scanner Darkly* is Dick's funniest novel, and his most affecting.

In 1972, striving to escape the druggy clutter, the spreading "murk," of his life, Dick traveled to Vancouver, where he gave a speech to an annual convention of science fiction writers. In his lecture, "The Android and the Human," Dick fashioned a kind of homespun anarchism, honoring young people of the '60s for their "sheer perverse malice," their willingness to defy power, to "build improved electronic gadgets in your garage that'll outwit the gadgets used by the authorities." Eschewing the dogmas of the New Left, he warned that all systems of explanation tend toward overdetermination, toward paranoia. Paranoia, for Dick, was a temptation and a trap. He feared conspiracies, and he feared the debilitating consequences of his fears. And so, he advised, one "should be content" with the fleeting and the marginal, the "mysterious, the meaningless, the contradictory, the hostile and, most of all, the unexplainably warm and giving." This sudden, self-justifying affection, which Dick also referred to as "caritas" and as "empathy," was the only guarantee of the "human."

Having diagnosed the breakdown of society in his speech, Dick suffered a breakdown of his own and checked into a Vancouver clinic run on brutal Synanon-style principles of rehabilitation. He was appalled by the clinic's ruthless assault on its patients and their personalities, but his worst pill-popping days were through. Lured by a college professor who admired his work, he returned to California and moved into a "jail-like, full-security" apartment complex in Orange County. He married again and began to clean up his life, even writing to President Nixon and offering his assistance in the war against drugs.

But a complacent Orange County serenity was not at hand. In March 1974 Dick underwent a series of visions that astonished and thrilled and hounded him for the rest of his life. An onslaught of otherworldly insight and illumination seemed to press down on him for weeks. ("Once God started talking ... he never seemed to stop. I don't think they report that in the Bible.") The elements of this experience, which he returned to obsessively in his writing, were many: flickering sequences of abstract color, three-eyed "invaders," Latin and Russian texts, visions of a "Black Iron Prison," messages that the Roman Empire never died, "hideous words" spoken out of an unplugged radio, a beam of pink light conveying knowledge.

When it was over, he believed that he had received confirmation that the universe was indeed the "cardboard fake" that he had long portrayed it to be. As in gnostic myth, the world of appearances was an "iron prison" under the sway of a defective deity; illumination was available only from outside the prison, from a pure source of knowledge that Dick referred to as a "Vast Active Living Intelligence System" (VALIS). For the remaining eight years of his life he filled notebook after notebook with an "Exegesis" of these peculiar days, constructing a gnostic cosmology involving "a double exposure of two realities superimposed." But Dick was never satisfied with his speculations. In the Exegesis and in his novel *Valis* (1981), he wrestled with himself, asking over and over whether his revelations were real, and if they were not, what had triggered them. (Radio signals from the future? Water-soluble vitamins? A stroke?)

Dick observed in 1978 that "my life ... is exactly like the plot of any one of ten of my novels or stories." After systematically dislocating the reality-principles of his readers, he came to find his own relation to reality increasingly unsure. He combed T.V. ads and record albums for signs of VALIS, the hidden god. Dick left his last wife in 1976 and moved back north to Sonoma, where he cruised the local asylum for dates and wrote *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer* (1982), a troubled memorial to his friend James Pike. (Pike, the former Episcopalian bishop of California, had vanished in the Jordanian desert looking for Jesus, leaving behind two bottles of warm Coke and a road map.) Meanwhile the Exegesis became a sprawling spiritual diary, by turns ordinary and extraordinary, filled with philosophical disputation, personal reminiscence and analysis of his previous work.

In the early '80s Dick's hopes for renown revived, as younger writers arrived at his doorstep, royalties increased and German, French and Japanese editions of his work proliferated. Back in the early '70s he had optioned his 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* to Hollywood; by 1980 the producers of the film promised that it would be the next *Star Wars*. (Dick

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hoped that Victoria Principal would have a starring role.) In fact, *Blade Runner* was a commercial disappointment in its initial release. But Dick never knew of its early unsuccess. In March 1982, he died of a stroke after proudly attending an advance screening of the movie.

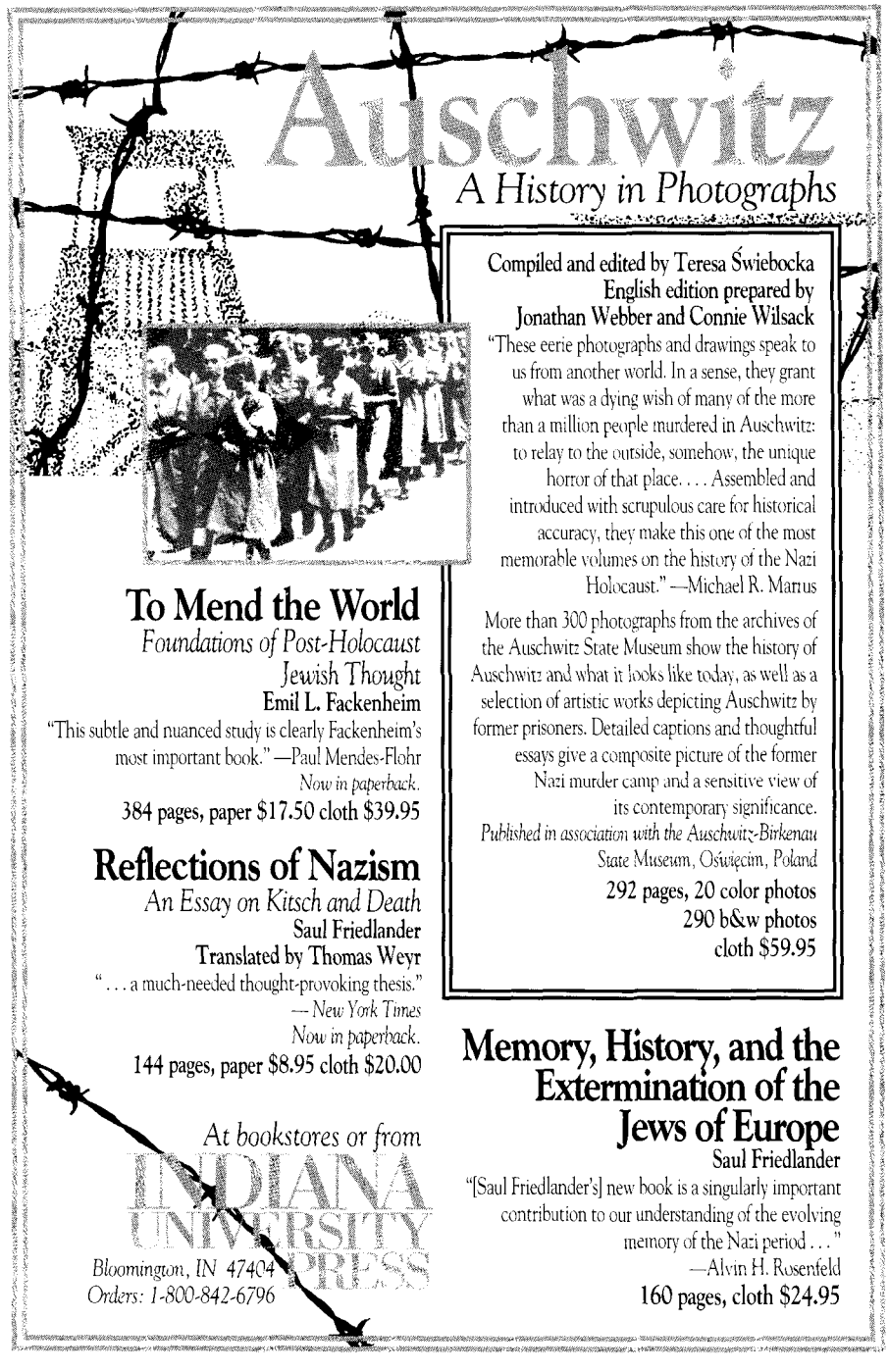
Despite the greater comfort and recognition in his last years, Dick maintained his restless work on the Exegesis, ever lamenting the failure of his visions to repeat themselves, their maddening resistance to explanation. Later passages of the Exegesis express his mingled resignation, devotion and ingenuity: "My attempt to know (VALIS) is a failure *qua* explanation.... Emotionally, this is useless. But epistemologically it is priceless. I am a unique pioneer ... who is hopelessly lost. & the fact that no one yet can help me is of extraordinary significance!" Like one of his own perplexed characters, strung out between parallel worlds, Dick never solved the puzzles that rattled him. "They ought to make it a binding clause that if you find God you get to keep him," he wrote sadly in *Valis*. "... Finding God (if indeed he did find God) became, ultimately, a bummer, a constantly diminishing supply of joy, sinking lower and lower like the contents of a bag of uppers. Who deals God?"

III.

In the years since his death, Philip Dick has attracted a small army of interpreters. He has been seen as a prophet of "hyperreality"; as a beleaguered and heroic humanist, championing "moral sanity" as his mind suffered; and as a gnostic visionary of the suburbs. Marxist critics and theorists of postmodernism have busily sifted through his work, investigating its debased commodities and corporate conspiracies, its cold war fears and its elevation of paranoia into principle. Dick's fiction, in the view of the critic Scott Durham, is nothing less than a full-blown "theology of late capitalism" that "reflects on the psychic strains of the transition to postindustrial capitalism." According to Jean Baudrillard, one of Dick's many French fans, it is "a total simulation without origin, past or future."

Dick himself, interestingly enough, was alternately gratified, amused and alarmed by the attention that modish critics gave to his work. When a delegation of French authorities visited him in Orange County to discuss his notions of "irrealism," he offered them an exposition of his views, but as soon as they left he telephoned the FBI and warned that there was a gang of subversives in the neighborhood. (Dick's politics were never especially coherent; he nearly dedicated *A Scanner Darkly* to Nixon's Attorney General Richard Kleindienst, but in the Exegesis he treats Nixon's resignation as a providential event in sacred history.) The Marxist and postmodern readings of Dick's work are often informative; his novels do have more than their share of simulacra and spectacles, fractured identities and postindustrial proletariats. But these readings do not do justice either to his insistence on compassion as a stabilizing force or to his earnest search for an "absolute reality." Their anatomy of "irrealism" is incomplete.

What, then, does this "irrealism" consist of? In the Exegesis, Dick confided that his writing had a single overriding theme: it indicted "the universe as a forgery (& our memories also)." In book after book, Dick portrayed the onset of doubt, of an elemental estrangement from reality. The perceived defect in the substance of the world is traced back to a variety of sources—atomic catastrophes and potent drugs, dangerous gods and political conspiracies, schizophrenic derangement and paranoid insecurity. But the origin doesn't really matter; it is the experience of "irreality" that interested him most. As his characters confront exasperating hallucinations and inter-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secting time-sequences, they respond with a typical blend of desperate speculation, cautious empathy and brittle humor. ("God is responsible for everything, but it's hard to get him to admit it.")

The most recurrent anxiety in Dick's fiction is that beneath the surface of appearances there is nothing except crude building materials: struts, wire, floor joists, rotten boards. This anxiety was suited to its times. The postwar heyday of science fiction coincided with a nationwide accumulation of raw materials; the United States became a *Popular Mechanics* utopia. There was plenty of tin and wire and aluminum to go around, and there were plenty of young inventors prepared to devise ingenious contraptions in their garages. More than any other science fiction writer, Dick turned these innocuous materials into the stuff of nightmare. What if the paste and wire and tinfoil substratum of the built environment was also the substratum of our own bodies and minds? Such a possibility arises in one Dick novel after another: that the world is made of "wires and staves and foam-rubber padding," that a man is a "skeleton wired together ... with bones connected with copper wire ... artificial organs of plastic and stainless steel ... the voice taped."

Indeed, you never know when one of Dick's full-bodied characters might become a creaky automaton, no longer capable of empathy, love or spontaneity. Sometimes the transposition is metaphorical: "Her heart ... was an empty kitchen: floor tile and water pipes and a drainboard with pale scrubbed surfaces, and one abandoned glass on the edge of the sink that nobody cared about." Often it is deadly literal. In a harrowing passage of *A Scanner Darkly*, Dick compares an addict to a machine, programmed to find the next score. A junkie is a "closed loop of tape" with a "brain of twisted wire"; his voice is "the music you hear on a clock-radio ... it is only there to make you do something ... He, a machine, will turn you into *his* machine."

In many of Dick's early novels, these distortions of perspective are attributed to paranoia. His characters fear conspiracies and plots, preordained worlds where "there are no genuine strangers." They also fear ordinary appliances and fixtures, dreading that "everything has a life of its own, vicious and hateful." Things, appliances, entire houses suddenly come alive, bristling with menace. In later novels, the focus shifts to schizophrenia. Dick's interest in abnormal psychology led him to the work of Ludwig Binswanger, a Swiss psychoanalyst who believed that schizophrenia involved a disturbance in the patient's orientation toward time. In his famous paper, "The Case of Ellen West," Binswanger described the "tomb world" that his subject seemed to inhabit, a realm of "moldering and withering" in which time no longer moved forward and West felt like "a nothing, a timid earthworm smitten by the curse surrounded by black night."

For Dick, the tomb world connoted a kind of interior entropy, a sentiment that the world and oneself are inexorably "moving toward the ash heap." The process of decline is all-embracing: people, places, things, time and space themselves all seem caught in a great storm of regression. Terrifying visions of the tomb world recur throughout Dick's novels of the late '50s and '60s. Tagomi, the sympathetic aesthete-bureaucrat of *The Man in the High Castle*, recoils from the presence of evil and likens human beings to "blind moles, creeping through the soil, feeling with our snouts. We know nothing." In *Martian Time-Slip* (1964), the autistic child Manfred intuits a grotesque future of ashen limbs and dust-covered rubble. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* a radiation-damaged truck driver lives amidst global scarcity and barren silence. *Ubik* is his greatest distillation of the theme; in a film scenario for the novel, Dick brilliantly proposed to embed this decay in the movie itself, using older film stocks and directing techniques as the story progressed.

Dick's alterations of ordinary reality, his tomb worlds and time-loops, never seem like conjuring tricks because he is able to establish the tangibility and the immediacy of the worlds that he disrupts. In *Time Out of Joint*, the bitter couple-swapping and boredom of '50s suburbia are nimbly detailed. Every potato peel and pinup photo is fully observed before the arrival of "leaks in our reality." As the town begins to flicker in and out of view, Dick hauntingly presents the edges of his pseudo-environment: Main Street trailing off into a half-glow of empty shopping strips and gas stations, the bus station queues that don't move, the strange airplanes that signal overhead.

Setting the immediate and the "irreal" into a precarious balance, Dick presented litanies of destruction, detailed inventories of objects that are named only as they vanish. In *Time Out of Joint*, we see "the soft-drink stand go out of existence, along with the counter man, the cash register, the big dispenser of orange drink, the taps for Coke and root beer, the ice-chests of bottles, the hot dog boiler, the jars of mustard, the shelves of cones, the row of heavy round metal lids under which were the different ice creams." In *Eye in the Sky*, the survivors of a nuclear accident find themselves trapped in each others' hallucinations. One member of the group is a fastidious Victorian moralist whose mind is a sexless place of soap factories and shrubbery. (For her, Freud believed in a basic urge to create cultural masterpieces, and worried that this impulse might be sublimated into sexual desire.) As she recoils from the polluted objects of the world, she wills their destruction. "Cheese, doorknobs, toothbrushes," she calls out, and they all vanish. Her dismal roll call continues, and the entire planet begins to disappear.

Dick's narrative method, here and elsewhere, is to furnish the world as he dismantles it. On a political level, this operation encapsulates the nuclear anxieties of the '50s. The artifacts of everyday life take on an extra poignancy, and a heightened presence, under the conditions of their own possible destruction. Indeed, only the specter of total incineration can make the sprawling banality of the California suburbs into something precious. But these vanishing things are also vulnerable to other, less apocalyptic dangers. In the degraded landscape of postwar consumerism, commodities are obsolescent and bear the seeds of their own demise. Dick sifts through the trash, the old magazines and the soiled wrappers; it is only a matter of time, he suggests, before the suburbs are swallowed by their own landfills. On an occult level, Dick's negations suggest something very different. Just as the mind can make the world, he implies, so it can unmake it. In a reversal of Adam's naming of the animals, the bestowal of names robs things of their materiality, it causes them to vanish. The danger, of course, is that you might not be the one with the power to name names. You might be on the list.

Dick's fallen worlds are not, to put it mildly, happy places. And yet they are at least partially redeemed by fleeting glimpses of a hidden god. "Trash" and divinity, Dick believed, were intimately linked. In an Exegesis entry, he wrote: "Premise: things are inside out ... Therefore the right place to look for the almighty is, e.g., in the trash in the alley." A "concealed god," he added in *Valis*, takes on "the likeness of sticks and trees and beer cans in gutters"; he "presumes to be ... debris no longer noticed" so that he can "literally ambush reality, and us as well." Dick did not regard the artifacts of industrial civiliza-

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tion as indices of man's alienation from the divine. God's disavowal of the world was both older and deeper. Carrying on a distinctly American visionary tradition, Dick proposed that God preferred industrial waste to holy sanctuaries. In its spiritualization of the coarse and the vulgar, Dick's demotic gnosticism unexpectedly echoes Emerson, or Whitman, or even Melville. He sought a kind of urban sublime, looking for shards of divinity in piles of junk.

Dick's spiritual beliefs were highly variable, but his ethical code was not. What becomes of love and loyalty, he asked, in a deceit-ridden world, in which all surfaces are suspect and all foundations can be unforged? Dick's concise, somewhat saccharine and still moving answer was that empathy is the only ground for morality. The existence of the "other" is a sufficient reason for helping the other. The problem is that "we don't have an ideal world where morality is easy because cognition is easy." The substitution of circuitry for nerve tissue can murder the possibility of empathy. Still, Dick insists that empathy is the only means to retain one's humanity in a world that is "metal and cruel." Many of his most memorable characters—Tagomi in *High Castle*, Leo Bulero in *Palmer Eldritch*—grope toward an identification with others in defiance of their hostile and unyielding circumstances. Dick's elevation of empathy is not a way to make morality easy; he was allergic to New Age bromides and to psychobabble of any kind. In the company of paste-and-wire executives and mechanical sweethearts, empathy is always a challenge.

Dick explored the problem of decency in a dead world most forcefully in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Rick Deckard is a bounty-hunter, paid to track down and destroy a party of androids that has infiltrated the planet. Deckard employs an "empathy" test that records his subjects' responses to unpalatable thoughts of cruelty and death; the test can distinguish between androids and their identical-looking human counterparts. The typical Dickian twist comes when Deckard, unlike one of his partners, begins to empathize with the androids that he kills. Does this mean that he might be an android himself, or does his powerful feeling of empathy confirm precisely that he is human? Deckard investigates incidents of empathy with the care of an experienced detective, but he cannot take anything for granted. The special horror of his work is that a sudden "flattening of affect" might occur at any time, to oth-

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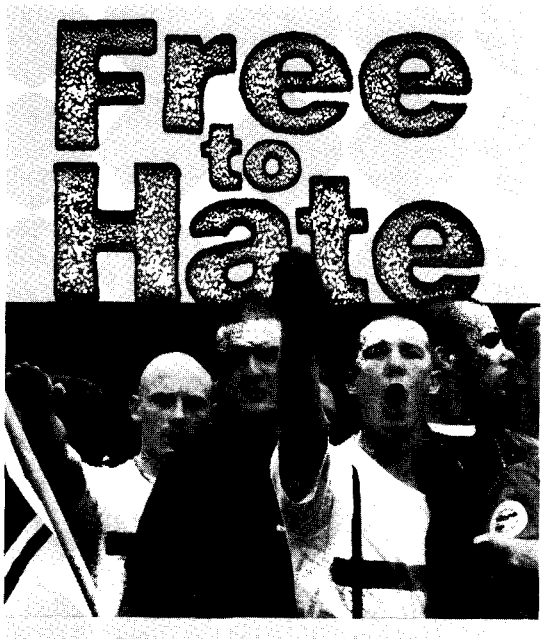

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ers or to himself. The practice of empathy is fragile, uncertain and imperative.

IV.

Science fiction is a dangerous profession. Its practitioners have often mistaken themselves for prophets. L. Ron Hubbard began as a novelist, and his preliminary draft of *Dianetics* appeared originally in the pages of Campbell's *Astounding Science Fiction*. Dick, too, was often unable to distinguish his writings from reality ("All I know today that I didn't know when I wrote *UBIK* is that *UBIK* isn't fiction"). But he never regarded himself as a priest or a propagandist. He worked out no system of spiritual evolution, no fourteen-point program for cosmic harmony. In his later work he diligently recorded his own struggle to cope with disquieting experiences and difficult losses. He held strange views, but he held them provisionally, and with a healthy measure of doubt. In his mystical writings, Dick was not trying to convert others, he was trying to comprehend himself. (Lawrence Sutin has produced a fascinating selection from the Exegesis, but it is unlikely that Dick ever intended these writings to be published.)

Dick's double compulsion to assemble and to disassemble fictional worlds might seem merely strange, the product of a fertile and eccentric mind. Yet both tendencies also inform the history of fiction itself. The traditional novel invents a solid material setting; it displays all the metronomes, mantle pieces and ledgers of middle-class life. Yet it also investigates the social world with a stringent and destabilizing skepticism, questioning the correspondence of reality and appearances, of motives and deeds. The objects that litter Dick's novels are mostly empty matchbooks and rusty bottle caps, forgotten relics of modern domesticity, but like a latter-day archaeologist of the suburbs, he uncovered their underlying integrity and facticity. At the same time, he subjected his ordinary things and citizens to a bracing and expansive doubt.

Paranoia is the flip side of omniscience; and so it is not surprising that the paranoid writer became a writer about God. Dick's social and psychological doubt was finally a kind of metaphysical doubt. He was exercised less by hidden intentions than by hidden substances. His fascination with the invisible foundations of the modern city led him to confront the problem of invisible foundations. And the breakdown of modern buildings and streets, which exposed the stuff of which they were really made, taught him that breakdown was also the occasion when hidden things might be revealed. In the most literal and physical way, modern life introduced Dick to the occult.

Dick was an esoteric writer who proposed dramatic revisions of reality whenever the inspiration came to him. But even at his most arcane, he was aware of the vulnerabilities and uncertainties of ordinary people. (The very antithesis of a Philip Dick character would be Arnold Schwarzenegger, who was disastrously miscast as the hero of *Total Recall*.) He did not believe that the arrival of universal simulation and information theory required the writer to relinquish his grasp on reality or to jettison his moral imagination. Rather, he regarded the novel as a laboratory in which to measure the tangibility of things and the shocks of sentience. Visionary literature and realistic fiction, fantasy and conscience, rarely meet. It took a man whose hunger was the match of his instability to bring them together. •

The Professor's New Clothes

By Cass R. Sunstein

There's No Such Thing as Free Speech And It's a Good Thing, Too by Stanley Fish

(Oxford University Press, 332 pp., $25)

The contemporary debate about free speech on the campus follows a predictable script. On one side stand the self-described absolutists. Proudly decrying political correctness, they claim to insist on principle. Invoking the specter of McCarthyism, they say that we may always control action, but that we may never control speech, however offensive we find it. On the other side are people who like to use the words "politics" and "power." They think that restrictions on speech are really all over the place, and that those restrictions are a product of—no surprise—"politics" and "power." For them, the question is not whether we should restrict speech, but whether the left or the right gets to decide whose speech will be restricted. In the words of Stanley Fish, free speech is "not an independent value but a political prize."

This is a confused and dreary debate, but it has major consequences, and we should try to figure out what is wrong with it. Fish's latest book is a fine occasion for such a clarification. A prominent member of the department of English at Duke, Fish has written a distinguished book on John Milton; and he is an influential literary theorist who has helped to establish the "reader response" school of literary criticism and has also argued that the meaning of a literary text is a function of the views of the "interpretive community." Recently, declaring himself a "pragmatist," Fish has become interested in law, where he is having a significant impact. He now teaches at Duke Law School and publishes in prominent law journals. His latest book consists of eighteen heterogeneous essays, a long introduction and an appendix in the form of an interview entitled "Fish Tales: A Conversation With 'The Contemporary Sophist.'"

Fish likes to say that "partisan politics," or some form of "political correctness," lies behind every assertion—from the right, from the left, from everywhere in between. Fish especially likes to say that there is no privileged place to stand. This claim, found on many pages of his book, is now prominent in many fields, including literature, anthropology, history and increasingly law; the ranks of all these fields are now swelled by the enemies of objectivity. I do not believe that this is a helpful or even an adequate claim. The idea that there is no privileged place to stand could mean that all of us make assumptions, have commitments and live in the world—in which case it is quite trivial, and hardly worth worrying over. Or the idea could mean that all views are equally valid and that we can never decide among them on the basis of good reasons—in which case it is deeply wrong.

And yet this denial of a privileged point of view is becoming popular, and so it is important to see what it is about. Fish has founded no school of thought—he is very much a special case—but he is influential, and what he thinks is thought in many other places, too. The first half of his book is mostly an attack on conservative critics of the university, whom Fish charges with treat-

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ing traditional education as if it were nonpartisan or handed down from God. The second half is directed mostly against liberals and radicals; Fish does not identify himself with the campus left, whose politics he does not share, and whose belief in liberation he likes to ridicule. Many of the essays in the first half come from Fish's spirited debates with Dinesh D'Souza, author of *Illiberal Education*, a widely read book that arraigned modern universities for sacrificing educational standards to the causes of affirmative action and political correctness. In these essays, Fish stakes out his own position, which is anti-anti-political correctness.

There are two parts to Fish's argument. The first is empirical. Fish says that the phenomenon of political correctness is, just as a matter of fact, overstated. On his view, well-financed right-wing groups have tried to "generalize a few tired incidents into an assertion of a wholesale crisis," feeding "the public's appetite for crisis with the help of a cadre of well-placed and largely ignorant journalists." But Fish doesn't just rely on facts. The second part of his argument, which is quite interesting and, I think, in some ways correct, is that the entire debate has been misdescribed. The contest is not between the advocates of merit or excellence and their left-wing adversaries, but between "two forms of political correctness." Before now, Fish says, there was also a political orthodoxy on the campus. It was just a different one: education was dominated by middle-class and upper-middle-class white males. Fish claims that it is ahistorical, or worse, to treat the new developments as imposing politics onto neutral territory. Instead we have a new set of political positions competing with the old.

According to Fish, complaints about "political correctness" have obscured this large point. Indeed, he thinks that there is no way of escaping "political correctness"—that everyone is in the grip of a certain set of convictions, many of them unanalyzed, and that to any particular person, those convictions will seem so self-evident that they will not even appear to be convictions. In his view, political correctness is literally inescapable, ubiquitous. It is not a characteristic of campus leftists alone.

In the title essay, Fish links his claim about the ubiquity of political correctness with an attack on the usual understandings of free speech. He says that freedom of speech does not exist, since social and even governmental intrusions on speech are inevitable (not good—inevitable). In some lamentably abstract jargon (of which most of the book is

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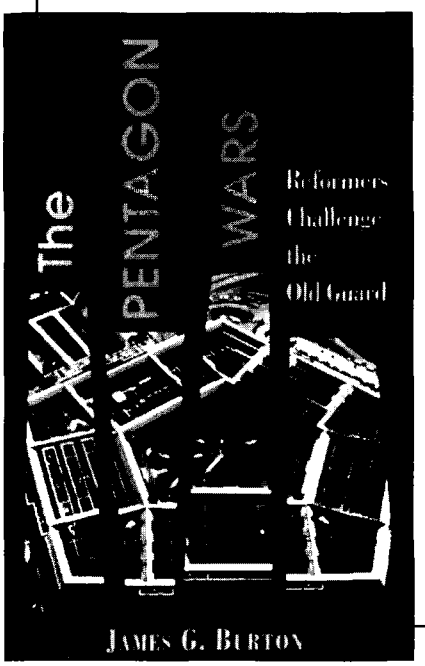

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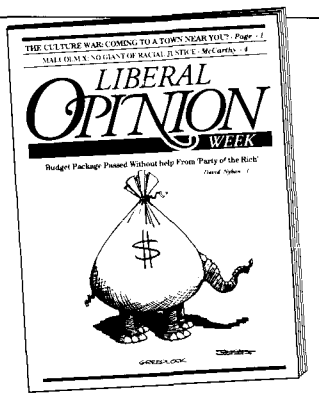

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free): "all affirmations of freedom of expression" are "dependent for their force on an exception that literally carves out the space in which expression can then emerge." Thus "the freedom has never been general and has always been understood against the background of an originary exclusion that gives it meaning."

I am not entirely sure what this means, but I think that Fish is mostly emphasizing something simple and not really controversial: that the scope of the free speech principle is determined by exceptions to that principle. Some limits on speech are nearly inevitable—for example, banning "Fire!" in a crowded theater; protecting private homes against people who want to yell in your bedroom; preventing perjury, conspiracy, attempted bribery, false advertising. So the question is not whether we will limit speech—the absolutist's false question—but when we will do so.

Fish adds that any marketplace of ideas will inevitably be managed by government. By this he appears to mean something simple, too: government determines the contours of the market by establishing, say, property rights and the law relating to tort and contract. Any random person can't get on NBC or write for *The New York Times*; and one reason is that government protects the property rights of both of these institutions, and any efforts to get access will be found to be unlawful acts of trespass. The playing field itself is a political construct. Fish says, too, that speech is not "free" in the sense that what people want to say is a product of social and ideological forces. Fish does not spend much time on this point, but he appears to mean that speakers are influenced, whether or not they are aware of it, by many social pressures, which form the background against which self-consciousness occurs.

Even though none of this is surprising, Fish thinks that a lot is at stake. If we are not free speech absolutists—and despite appearances, who really is?—the distinction between protected speech and unprotected speech will always show, in Fish's view, that a "political line" has been drawn. In a nutshell (and a mouthful):

> Abstract concepts like free speech do not have any "natural" content but are filled with whatever content and direction one can manage to put into them.... Free speech in short is not an independent value but a political prize, and if that prize has been captured by a politics opposed to yours, it can no longer be invoked in ways that further your purposes, for it is now an obstacle to those purposes.... We have never had any normative guidance for marking off protected from unprotected speech.... In short, the name of the game has always been politics.

What about seeking principles to govern the system of free expression? Any line-drawing effort will rest "on disputable definitions and stipulations of value." The exercise "will always be a political and contestable action and therefore inseparable from the biases and blindnesses inherent in politics." With this point we get to the heart of what Fish considers to be his most important claims (and now we are dealing with some widely held views in academic circles). No view about free speech will be based on external and transcendent standards. No one is really an absolutist; this means that we are all partisans pushing political agendas. These claims help define parts of Fish's own creed, which he labels "pragmatism."

Unlike Fish, many people believe that a recognition of contingency—of the absence of extrahuman or transcendental standards—is liberating. It helps us see that we are often imprisoned by our own categories, and that we might do something other than what we do; it thus helps us embark on the project of figuring out what to do, by reference to our interests and our needs. This conviction can be found among many liberals and progressives, and many pragmatists, including two great founders of pragmatism, John Dewey and William James. But Fish has no patience with all this. There is nothing liberating about his form of pragmatism. We are still stuck in all we have: our beliefs. Fish therefore insists that pragmatism leads absolutely nowhere. He is weirdly proud of this. "Hearkening to me will lead to nothing. Hearkening to me is supposed to lead to nothing."

Thus Fish is sharply critical of Richard Rorty, Richard Posner and Ronald Dworkin—the first two self-styled pragmatists, the third sometimes said to fall in that category—on the ground that all three make recommendations for what society and law should actually do. Dworkin in particular says that judges are often reflective and critical, at least in the sense that they look for a theory behind a precedent or a legal text, and seek to decide hard cases by helping to develop that theory, or by deciding on the point of that precedent or text. Fish has no sympathy for this account. He thinks that people just do what they do, and that no theory behind a practice really is necessary to the practice, or helps to generate it. Nor is Fish at all enthusiastic about Posner's apparently innocuous (and pragmatic) suggestion that an inquiry into facts and consequences, illuminated by economics, can help with social and legal problems. "All I have to recommend is the game, which, since it doesn't need my recommendations, will proceed on its way undeterred and unimproved by anything I have to say."

Fish is especially scornful of "liberalism," which he takes to embody the search for neutrality among competing agendas, the belief that reason can resolve everything and the insistence that conviction, belief and passion are "very close to fascism." It's well worth noting that this is a distinctly peculiar description of liberalism. All or almost all the great liberals—Madison, Mill, Dewey, Constant—thought nothing of the sort. Nor does the description fit such contemporary liberals as John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, Susan Okin, T. M. Scanlon and Joseph Raz. In an essay on the law of contract, Fish contends that "legal reasoning is circular, question-begging and endlessly manipulable," but he thinks that these are not criticisms of legal reasoning. In Fish's view, the very legitimacy of legal practice depends on disguising ("effacing") these facts. Legitimacy requires an appearance of logical compulsion when manipulation is really at work. But for Fish, nothing is at all wrong with this "amazing trick." Where he finds circularity and manipulation, he issues no call to reform.

What might account for all this? I speculate that the animating impulse of Fish's work (like much other writing in this vein) is democratic. He wants to say that philosophers and theorists are nothing special, that they are just like the rest of us. His debunking impulse is intended to be antiaristocratic: he opposes what he sees as the aristocratic view that some people can stand above our practices and evaluate them. But does Fish's own position make sense? Is it a sensible way to be democratic? Or—the old pragmatic test—is his position useful?

I think that it is not. Loudly proclaiming the pragmatic heritage, Fish (most ironically) offers little that is useful to real human beings. Yet the original pragmatists, in whose mantle Fish wraps himself, were devoted to doing just that. They sought to avoid large abstractions in favor of examining what could be put to human use. To this end John Dewey, probably their most distinguished member, sharply challenged existing intellectual and social conventions and constantly insisted on the enterprise of reasserting liberalism's human possibilities. But Fish's pragmatism consists

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largely of abstractions, says little about human possibilities and ridicules liberalism. It comes across as mostly tired and even as self-righteous in the sense that it insists that we are stuck in our current understandings—our conventions—and that we cannot get a critical purchase on them.

The difference is important, for Fish is not alone here. Pragmatism is enjoying a huge rebirth in the academy, partly under the influence of Rorty; but in its new incarnation pragmatism has sometimes become a set of unhelpfully broad claims, geared not to solving human problems but to making them seem far away, even trivial. (I do not include all current pragmatists here; for all their differences, the philosopher Hilary Putnam and Posner—for example—are keeping faith with much of the pragmatic project.)

Let's pause for a moment with pragmatism's original concerns. All of the original pragmatists—Dewey, James, Charles Peirce—emphasized the human origins of human claims. Our views, they believed, are inevitably a product of our own interpretive filters; we do not have unmediated access to the world. In making this claim, the pragmatists criticized what is sometimes called "foundationalism" or "metaphysical realism." But the pragmatists did not think that we should give up on ideas like truth. For James, when an idea or belief is said to be true, we should always ask "what concrete difference will its being true make in anyone's actual life? ... What, in short, is the truth's cash-value in experiential terms?" The pragmatists thought that we should not see truth in a disembodied way; we should think of truth not as a "stagnant property inherent in" an idea (James's words), but as something that is made true by experiences and events. In short, we need to figure out what is useful to human beings, and what matters for them.

On this view, pragmatism does not mean that the idea of truth is a fraud, that objectivity is a false ideal or that it is unimportant to be rigorous about truth. It does not lead to the play of perspectives or to simple conventionalism. It hardly spells the end of philosophy. On the contrary, the human role in creating truth and meaning meant more philosophical work, not less philosophical work. The pragmatists offered a rallying cry for more rigor, more and better philosophy and more clarity, in the interest of exploring what difference our claims might make in our lives. Their insistence on the living relationship between truth and experience was not a cynical or sophistic enterprise.

Fish's version of pragmatism is nothing like this; it is as if Dewey and James have been put through a bizarre distorting mirror. Since Fish usually (and vulgarly) sees "political prizes" everywhere, he generally provides no one with a reason to accept any position, including Fish's own. ("Hearkening to me will lead to nothing. Hearkening to me is supposed to lead to nothing.") Furthermore, he recommends "the game" but is largely reluctant to play it; he says everything is political positioning, and then usually refuses to take political positions. This is an oddly distanced and self-insulating view, quite foreign to the pragmatic heritage.

Think for a moment about Fish's own claims. Does he believe that they are actually true? In what sense? Fish's own words strongly suggest that he thinks his own claims *are* true, not in the sense that they can be defended from an external or transcendental standpoint, but in the sense that they are based on good reasons, of the sort that sensible people use when evaluating arguments about facts and values. In making factual claims, Fish seems to want readers to adhere to conventional standards—showing with actual numbers, for example, that Shakespeare is still very widely read on the campus, hardly taking a back seat to African American writers. And in arguing about issues of value, he tries to appeal to the reader's own convictions, showing how past exclusionary practices are relevant to assessing current educational reforms.

Nor is it at all clear that metaphysical realism or foundationalism has really been routed. (Fish just asserts that the issue is closed, without engaging the complex issues involved.) But let us suppose that we really must be pragmatists, understanding pragmatism to mean very simply that there are no wholly extra-human grounds for our beliefs, and that our beliefs are justified to the extent that they serve our own human purposes. Then all the work must begin. This was obvious to James and Dewey; it is also a starting point for Rawls's version of liberalism. Of course people often disagree about things that they care about, and of course it would be most surprising if partisan struggle did not affect ultimate outcomes. But what makes Fish's book (and much related current work) so puzzling is that it does not try to describe how people might deal with urgent questions, such as what a good system of free speech would look like. It rests instead on pretty uninteresting and abstract claims about the inevitability of exceptions and the likelihood of bias.

Turn now to the matter of free

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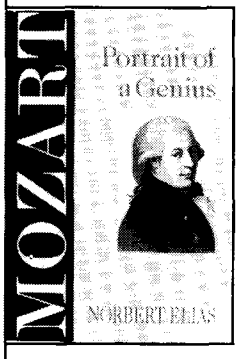

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speech. In insisting that free speech is not an absolute, and in pointing to the inevitability of both social and governmental constraints, Fish is entirely right. What he says here is a useful corrective to many current claims. Free speech absolutism is at best a theology—indeed, a theology in which no one really believes. Often regulation of speech is perfectly acceptable; consider again the laws governing perjury, attempted bribery, false commercial speech, unlicensed medical and legal advice, criminal solicitation, access of speakers to private property and much more.

But the failure of free speech absolutism does *not* mean that there is no such thing as free speech. (Speed limit laws exist even though ambulance drivers and police officers can go as fast as they need to go; there is a law against murder even though you can kill in self-defense; the fact that you can't make a contract to sell heroin doesn't eliminate freedom of contract, and so on.) Instead we need to develop principles by which we may run a good system of free expression. The whole question, a central one in contemporary democracies, is how to proceed when some distinctions are inevitable.

About this question, Fish has little to say. Still, we can start by insisting that in the American legal order, decisions are supposed to be made on the basis of reasons, not on the basis of authority or "nature." A system of free speech allows competing views to be brought forward. It permits people who disagree to offer reasons for their views. Reasons should be met with reasons. The goal of all this is a kind of deliberative democracy, in which political accountability and majority rule are combined with an obligation to allow judgments to emerge through public discussion. Ideals of this kind are fully compatible with the pragmatic conception of truth. I don't mean to say that Fish disparages public discussion or process or reason-giving; he doesn't really take a stand on them. But because Fish sees pragmatism as a kind of crude perspectivism, he is unable to discuss its basic ideals.

If we inspect those ideals, we will probably conclude that the current system of free expression has many problems. Some people think that new restrictions on campaign expenditures would violate the First Amendment, but our present approach to expenditures on campaigns cannot be easily justified; disparities in wealth should not translate, as they now do, into disparities in political influence. Nor is it clear that the current system of broadcasting regulation is anything to celebrate. Advertisers influence the content of programming, especially since they dislike controversial or depressing shows. The result is to deter risk-taking discussion, or even serious discussion of important topics. In any case, the economic market often creates an accelerating "race to the bottom," reducing quality, limiting programming about public issues and substituting sound bites and sensationalism for attention to what really matters.

In these circumstances, a different system of regulation might actually improve the speech market. We might consider greater public financing of elections, and at least some version of the fairness doctrine for broadcasters, requiring or encouraging licensees to attend to public issues and to ensure a diversity of views. Thus we should have campaign finance laws if they reduce the distorting effects of wealth on elections, and efforts to encourage political discussion on the airwaves should be entirely acceptable. At the very least, we need much more democratic talk and experimentation on these subjects.

All this suggests that we might understand the principle of free speech at least partly through the lens of democracy. If we do this, we will not be thrilled with a system of laissez-faire for speech; sometimes laissez-faire will not serve democratic goals. And from this simple point we are also on the way to coming to terms with the issue of hate speech, which occupies much of Fish's book. We should probably draw a distinction between speech codes that intrude on the exchange of ideas and speech codes that are limited to the regulation of simple epithets. The latter are far less objectionable than the former. Fish, once more, discusses none of these details. He briefly supports restrictions on "hate speech," which he does not define, and he says that he can "offer reasons" for his view. Then he offers no reasons.

So much for law. The problem of political correctness raises broad issues about how to think about the ideal of "neutrality" on the campus and elsewhere. Fish puts his finger on something infuriating about the current discussion, which is that it is simply not true that most universities are overrun by radical leftists, or that the traditional curriculum is neutral. Until recently, for example, history departments largely ignored women and constitutional law courses said little about slavery.

Fish is right to complain about the partisan aims behind many of the attacks on "political correctness," which are most selective in their complaints about slanted teaching. There is no similarly derisive term to describe what happens when a law professor disparages the concept of "fairness," when a historian ridicules feminism, when an economist treats distributional issues as trivial or silly. To be sure, the words "political correctness" aptly describe some deplorable classrooms in which literature is assessed only on political grounds and left-wing platitudes can be challenged at the student's risk; but those words could also be applied, say, to many economics departments, where a student risks ridicule if she challenges the assumptions of neoclassical economics. Consider even the "she" in the foregoing sentence. Is it political? Is it correct?

But people like Fish are not in a good position to sort out these issues. Those who see partisan views everywhere are unlikely to be able to explain which challenges to traditional education have merit and which do not. Teachers have to figure out what and how to teach. Fish claims that every view about education rests on substantive assumptions or on "politics." If he means that everyone has convictions, and that any judgment about education must have substance behind it, then no one could object. But we have to know what that substance might be. And there is all the difference in the world between authoritarian education and liberal education, even if liberal education is not value-free.

The real question involves the appropriate content of liberal education at the university level, and about this matter claims about contingency and the biases of the past provide little help. Those who want to defend educational reform cannot rest content with a demonstration that defenders of tradition can be biased, too. They should come up with their own conception of a good education. They should defend that conception on the basis of reasons, which must include an account of the purpose of education. I think that the liberal tradition is well equipped to provide such a defense and such an account; and surely it is in a better position to do so than those who emphasize the unsurprising point that all claims are situated. If we are to revive the spirit of James and Dewey, both of them liberals, it should hardly be in a mood of perspectivism or conventionalism, but on the basis of their commitment to rigor and clarity, and their insistence on the relationship between intellectual life and the rest of life.

CASS R. SUNSTEIN is Karl N. Lewellyn Professor of Jurisprudence at the University of Chicago Law School and author of *Democracy and the Problem of Free Speech* (Free Press).

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Tyrants and Technocrats

BY S. FREDERICK STARR

The Ghost of the Executed Engineer: Technology and the Fall of the Soviet Union by Loren R. Graham

(Harvard University Press, 128 pp., $22.95)

Before me sits a 3 inch by 3 inch packet made of cheap cardboard, purchased for about three cents at a kiosk in Moscow. It contains twenty-five *papirosy*, those cigarettes of shag tobacco whose pungent aroma evokes the very essence of working-class life in Russia. Curving across one side is a crudely printed blue label reading *Belomorkanal*, or "White Sea Canal." Adjoining it is a map of Russia's rivers, which appear like blue veins, and among them a single red line, which represents the great canal.

In its day, this muddy ditch was considered one of the engineering wonders of the world, at least by Stalin's government. Its construction was celebrated in films, popular songs and heroic odes. Factories were named after it. Yet at least 200,000 workers, all of them slave laborers, lost their lives hewing this canal out of the frozen pine bogs. In spite of all this, the canal proved essentially useless, and damaging to the environment to boot. For a Russian manufacturer to celebrate it with a popular brand of cigarettes is like a French firm producing a St. Bartholomew's brand perfume, or a Polish company selling Katyn Forest hams.

This pack of "Belomors," as they are called, bears witness to the fact that the Soviet system boldly invited the world to judge it by its engineering marvels. Dams, subways, steel mills and rockets were all built to gigantomaniac proportions, and then paraded before world public opinion as if their existence somehow proved the validity and relevance of Marxism-Leninism. And yet nearly every one of these achievements of "Socialist construction" proved to be an economic folly, an ecological disaster and a human tragedy. Few countries have been so systematically despoiled and plundered as the Soviet Union, and in no country have grand projects conceived and designed by engineers contributed more directly to a declining quality of life.

It was not always thus. Lenin hoped to harness the talents of engineers for human uplift. Even though he was suspicious of the engineers' politics, he realized that electrification and other improvements in industry and agriculture could not go forward without the help of capable and socially responsible technicians. How, then, did Lenin's technological idealism turn into Stalin's technocratic nightmare? Loren R. Graham has pondered this question in notable books and articles over several decades. That was what he was doing on an icy Moscow day in January, 1991, as he pored through recently opened secret Soviet archives. To his great surprise, he stumbled across the long-suppressed papers of Russia's greatest engineer.

Here they were, complete and intact, preserved thanks to the compulsively meticulous habits of the old KGB. In one stroke, the lost world of Peter Palchinsky, one of Russia's most high-minded and ethical technologists, emerged from the black hole of memory to which it had been consigned after his death. Here, finally, was the life's record of a brilliant Russian engineer who had welcomed the overthrow of tsardom and toiled to build a better society in the 1920s, only to be executed by firing squad in 1929. Graham sensed that Palchinsky's fall epitomized the fate of humanistic technology in the Soviet Union, and may even help explain why the Soviet government embraced such manic schemes as the White Sea Canal. He set out to reconstruct the whole story, which he now presents to us in this provocative and engaging volume.

Palchinsky was a year younger than Herbert Hoover and resembled that great American technician and public figure in certain respects. Both were mining engineers. Both viewed their field as a most public and civic science. Both were sure that technology could solve the ills of humanity if only politicians would stand aside and allow it to do so. A chief difference between them, and one that proved decisive, is that Hoover embraced capitalism while Palchinsky became a Socialist, and even logged time in tsarist jails for his beliefs.

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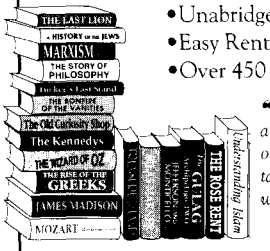

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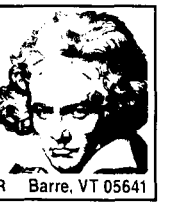

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Mangosteens

These are the absolute top of the line,
I was telling him, they even surpass
the Jiangsu peach and the McIntosh
for lusciousness and subtlety.... (He frowned:
McIntosh. How spelling.) We were eating
our way through another kilogram
of mangosteens, for which we'd both fallen
hard. I'd read that Queen Victoria
(no voluptuary) once offered a reward
for an edible mangosteen: I don't know
how much, or whether it was ever claimed.
(But not enough, I'd guess, and no, I hope.)
Each thick skin yields to a counter-twist,
splits like rotted leather. Inside, snug
as a brain in its cranium, half a dozen
plump white segments, all but dry, part
to the tip of the tongue like lips—they *taste*
like lips, before they're bitten, a saltiness
washed utterly away; crushed, they release
a flood of unfathomable sweetness,
gone in a trice. He lay
near sleep, sunk back against a slope
of heaped-up bedding, stroked slantwise by fingers
of afternoon sun. McIntosh, he said again,
still chewing. I'd also been reading *The Spoils*
of Poynton, so slowly the plot seemed to unfold
in real-time. " 'Things' were of course
the sum of the world," James tosses out
in that mock-assertive, contradiction-baffling
way he has, quotation marks gripped like a tweezers
lest he soil his hands on *things*,
as if the only things that mattered
were that homage be paid to English widowhood,
or whether another of his young virgins
would ever marry. (She wouldn't, but she would,
before the novel closed, endure one shattering
embrace, a consummation.) I spent the day
sleepwalking the halls of museums, a vessel
trembling at the lip. Lunch was a packet
of rice cakes and an apple in a garden
famed for its beauty, and deemed beautiful
for what had been taken away. I can still hear it,
still *taste* it, his quick gasp of astonishment
caught in my own mouth. I can feel that house
going up with a shudder, a clockwise funnel
howling to the heavens, while the things of her world
explode or melt or shrivel to ash
in the ecstatic emptying. The old woman set the fire
herself, she must have, she had to. His letter,
tattooed with postmarks, was waiting for me
back at the ryokan, had overtaken me
at last, half in Chinese, half in hard-won
English, purer than I will ever write—

Please don't give up me in tomorrow

The skin was bitter. It stained the tongue.

I want with you more time

DANIEL HALL

In other respects Palchinsky was a typical engineer of his era. On the one hand, he was a rationalist who worshiped data and statistics. On the other hand, the long years he spent studying coal mines in the Donbas region had led him also to appreciate the human factor in technology and production. Thanks to this, he came to champion the eight-hour day and to favor the construction of small, locally managed firms rather than large, centrally controlled enterprises.

It is no surprise that Palchinsky was also attracted to the very mild form of anarchism championed by Prince Kropotkin. Such views meshed nicely with the moderate socialism championed by Alexander Kerensky, who took power after the fall of Nicholas II in February, 1917. Kerensky welcomed Palchinsky's backing and even placed him in charge of defending the Winter Palace when the Bolsheviks launched their armed coup against it in October of that year. Lenin, once he took power, promptly jailed Palchinsky for this misstep.

When Palchinsky got out of prison, he managed to convince himself that Russia under Communist rule could yet realize his fondest dreams for economic and social betterment. Accordingly, he went to work for Lenin's State Planning Commission (Gosplan), threw himself into the reform of engineering education and turned up as technical consultant at many of the most important engineering projects in the land. Yet by 1929 Palchinsky was dead. His crime was to have insisted on reviewing all pertinent statistics for one of the government's pet projects before submitting a recommendation regarding its viability.

Is it a coincidence that Palchinsky's death coincided with Stalin's consolidation of power and the emergence of a virtual cult of large-scale and seemingly unconstrained engineering? Was it accidental that this believer in the principle that small is beautiful was shot just as his country was launching the most gigantic engineering projects since the Great Pyramids?

Graham contrasts Palchinsky's rational and humane initiatives of the 1920s with the ill-conceived and monstrous projects that followed. As he describes the sad decline, Graham comes close to suggesting that things might have been different had Palchinsky lived. Following a similar line of reasoning, many Western scholars spent years idealizing the pre-1929 Soviet Union and especially Nikolai Bukharin, the urbane yet ideologically correct Communist theoretician of those years who was suppressed

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by Stalin. Both visions imply that by the mid-'20s the USSR had achieved a functioning form of socialism that was free of Stalinism, and that this happy situation was upset only by a bitter accident of history.

But Graham stops well short of this naïve dream. He points out that Palchinsky was arrested three times during the supposedly kind and gentle years of the New Economic Policy, and that he was convinced he had to stay clear of Leningrad for fear of being jailed there. Graham also notes that such monster projects as the huge Dnieper dam were already in planning during the 1920s and that Palchinsky did not succeed in raising more than a feeble rearguard action against them. When the Bolsheviks tried to take over his beloved All-Russian Society of Engineers, Palchinsky resigned rather than submit to their control. He also quit Gosplan, convinced that his voice of moderation there was inaudible.

Clearly the years of the New Economic Policy were no golden age of humanistic technology in Russia. And even if they had been a golden age, Palchinsky was poorly cast for the role of engineer-humanist in a modern civil society. For all his natural sympathy for workers, Palchinsky was not prepared to accept the irrational decisions that workers might produce if they were left to vote in free elections. And while he favored the introduction of courses on political economy into Russia's engineering schools, he excluded all non-Socialist, Western and market-oriented theories from his curriculum. Nor is there any evidence that he lost much time in pondering this decision. In his way, Palchinsky, too, was a true believer.

With wistful understatement, Graham admits that Palchinsky "badly misunderstood the political course of the Soviet Union." It appears, rather, that he misunderstood politics, period. He was no more prepared to entrust decision-making to the caprice of Socialist managers than to workers or to capitalists. The only people capable of reaching objective and rational decisions, he believed, were engineers. A powerful government was fine, provided its leaders would take their cues from engineers and scientists.

In such a scheme, there is no place at all for politics in the normal sense. For Palchinsky, there was but one truth and he possessed it. More accurately, he believed that his *profession* possessed it. In a stupefyingly obtuse letter to Alexander Rykov, then prime minister of the USSR, he went so far as to call for the creation of a "Technocrats' International," or Tekhintern, to replace the Communist International or Comintern established by the official Party. In a rare moment of political realism, Palchinsky decided against posting this astonishing epistle.

Graham argues that the shadow of Palchinsky's benevolent concept of engineering lies over the dehumanized engineering projects that dominated Soviet life between his death and the final collapse of the system in 1991. The shadow is there, to be sure, but its contours are contradictory. It cannot be denied that Palchinsky was a humanist and would have opposed such idiocies as the giant steel mill at Magnitogorsk, the pointless Baikal-Amur Railroad (BAM), the primitive nuclear reactors at Chernobyl and the White Sea Canal. His ghost, had it been abroad in Russia, would have struck terror in the hearts of those brutal Soviet engineers who sacrificed both humankind and nature to realize these morbid visions.

If Palchinsky was a humanist, however, he was also a scientific determinist. His vision had no place for citizenship, democracy or all the indeterminacy of civil society. Like those who destroyed him, he placed his hope in dictatorship—Socialist, to be sure, but still dictatorship. In this respect, Palchinsky was the true heir of the eccentric Saint-Simon, the anti-Jacobin French engineer who proposed that Napoleon exercise power through a grand council of *savants* and technicians. Over the century preceding Palchinsky, Saint-Simon's seductive ideas exerted a strong influence on many Russian thinkers, who saw in them the keys to modernity, as well as the keys to their own central place in the dawning age. In practice, this Saint-Simonian cast of mind had the paradoxical effect of helping perpetuate the autocratic tradition in Russian politics.

In his essay on "The End of the Modern Era," Václav Havel equated the fall of communism with the waning dominance of "arrogant, absolutist reason" in human affairs. Whether or not this proves to be correct in the long run, it suggests a conclusion about Palchinsky that is somewhat less flattering than the one reached in this book. Graham refers approvingly to the Soviet Union's "impressive start" in technology back in the 1920s. Reading his fine little study, however, one is left wondering if that impressive start did not get off on the wrong foot, even with Palchinsky.

Of course, one can take mischievous pleasure in imagining old Palchinsky's ghost tormenting those soulless engineers whom Stalin and his successors empowered to design their Brave New World. But what about the ghost itself? How might it have viewed those who came after it? Did the specter of the sensitive and decent Palchinsky ever suspect that its own technocratic faith in "absolutist reason" had more in common with the builders of the White Sea Canal than it had realized while it was still a flesh and blood Soviet engineer, toiling among the living?

S. FREDERICK STARR is the president of Oberlin College and the author of a forthcoming biography of the composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk.

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Voulez-Vous

IT'S NOT OFTEN THAT A MAGAZINE gets a letter from a staffer at the White House as pointed as William Galston's this week. So maybe I should risk the danger of being drenched in ironic self-consciousness and answer it. Not that Alex Ross cannot do so himself (see page 4); but the letter, in its doleful defense of earnest Clintonism, raises larger questions about what's wrong with so many of the Clintonites, what lies at the heart of their weak grasp on the culture, what animates their poe-faced inability to connect with much of the country and what generates *in toto* their well-disseminated, all-round lameness.

ROSS'S MAIN POINT WAS THAT A culture saturated in televised self-consciousness is not quite as ingenuous as Clinton staffers want it to be; that the viewers who relish Letterman, Limbaugh, "The Simpsons" and "Seinfeld" tend to be, as voters, a teeny bit skeptical of an administration that can deliver a 1,300-page bill on health care reform (and an 800-page appendix) with a straight face, or one that is so suffused with a sense of its own technocratic rightness that the First Lady can use the words "mission-driven" and "politics of meaning" without a trace of self-awareness flitting across her brow. On the face of it, this argument about American culture doesn't seem to me to be particularly insidious. It doesn't mean that American citizens don't know when to be serious and when to smirk, or that they have erased any distinction between politics and culture. Nor does it amount to a descent into barbarism, an ascent into "aestheticized elitism" (whatever that means) or a soft spot for Leni Riefenstahl. It means simply that in the war for what liberals (and principled conservatives) believe in, a certain amount of irony in an increasingly ironized culture can come in handy. It helps get your message across; it's a healthy sign of self-awareness; and, in this day and age, it goes hand-in-hand with an appropriate measure of maturity and even modesty. The odd, self-deprecating, ironic crack on the part of the president would do more for his political fortunes than any amount of further packaging around the mantras of "security" or "change."

BUT THERE'S MORE HERE. GALston assumes, in his substantive vein, that irony is an alternative to seriousness. In fact, it's a symptom of it. When taken to its cynical extremes—as in the cases of Letterman and Limbaugh and a gaggle of twentysomething nihilists—irony can be a form of shallow pop-cultural decadence. And, yes, Thomas Mann helped pave the way for the Nazis. But in 1993, irony doesn't have to amount to a political philosophy to be an adornment to one. And there's something truly scary about a person faced with the contradictions of modern life who doesn't have occasional recourse to a sense of the absurd. If you could detect a trace of this sensibility among more members of this administration, if you didn't stare into the face of a Berger, Sperling, Galston or Magaziner and see nothing but mind-numbing earnestness coming back the other way, you might feel a little bit more confident about the future of the country.

TWO RECENT BOOKS MAKE THE point better than I can here: Richard Reeves's *President Kennedy: Profile of Power*, and Margaret Thatcher's auto-hagiography. In Kennedy, you have a man whose irony was critical to his being both sane and brave in the face of the cold war's nuclear gamble. In Thatcher, you have a woman whose inability to see the fickleness of things, and whose complete lack of self-consciousness made her first a wonder to behold, but ultimately a monster. In many respects, she achieved far more than Kennedy (and in over-ironized Britain was a breath of fresh air); but Kennedy is still the more durable figure, because he recognized, in a way that became inseparable from his personality, that things are hardly ever as they seem, that self-awareness is the prerequisite to real moral courage. It was this ironic detachment that gave the edge to his otherwise conventional idealism. He was able, like Reagan, to convince others of his seriousness by being so unserious about himself; he had few illusions; his relationship to his religious faith was almost academic; he spent half his life undermining the principles of the other half. Yes, in some ways, his was a politics of irony. But it was one that served the purposes of liberalism more sturdily than the piety of Hillary Rodham Clinton.

AMONG THE MORE IRONIC PHENOmena of our age is the success of the newly released album, *Abba Gold*. I remember Abba when they first burst onto the scene with their stunning victory at the 1973 Eurovision Song Contest. Eurovision is an annual T.V. pop pageant in which dozens of countries vie for a lowest-common-denominator Euro-tune to capture the gorgeous mosaic of the European Community. Abba (the name, one recalls, was formed by the first letters of the group's names: Agnetha, Björn, Benny and Anna-Frid) prevailed in this exacting task by mastering the English-as-second-language lyric and the après-ski, '70s uplift that subsequently made them mega. To listen to them today (once you pass the pain barrier) is to enter a nostalgia-sauna, the Swedish accents providing the essential counterpoint to lyrics like: "I have a dream / A song to sing. / To help me cope with everything." There are the occasional historical analogies: "My my! At Waterloo, Napoleon did surrender / And I have met my destiny in quite a similar way." And a random wade into philosophical depth: "The winner takes it all / The loser standing small. / The Gods may throw the dice / Their minds as cold as ice." And those immortal Swedish rhyming schemes: "Seeing me so tense / No self-confidence." The recent fascination with the '70s stems from the fact that at least some people in recent memory were clearly more embarrassing than we are; but with Abba, I think, there's something a little less complex going on. There are simply some products in the universe of truly awful pop culture that make you inexplicably happy.

JEFF SCHMALZ, THE *NEW YORK Times* reporter, died of AIDS two weeks ago, at the ripe old age (in modern gay time) of 39. I knew him a little: well enough to recognize a mind whose capacity for bullshit-detection never dimmed and who was thus able to face extinction in a truly honest way. He saw through much of the cant of gay ideology and yet remained completely committed to explaining the reality of being in a minority, and, then, of being terminally ill. Sometimes, I felt, his anger got the better of his later journalism; and his emergence as a pioneer for gay visibility unfortunately led people to forget his sharp, earlier reporting. But one can hardly blame him for that. What, after all, does it say of our culture that it took a brain seizure three years ago to unleash Schmalz's talent for the thing he knew best? Or of life that the very thing that unfettered him should now so peremptorily take him away? An irony, I know. But one that unfortunately fails to lighten with time.

ANDREW SULLIVAN

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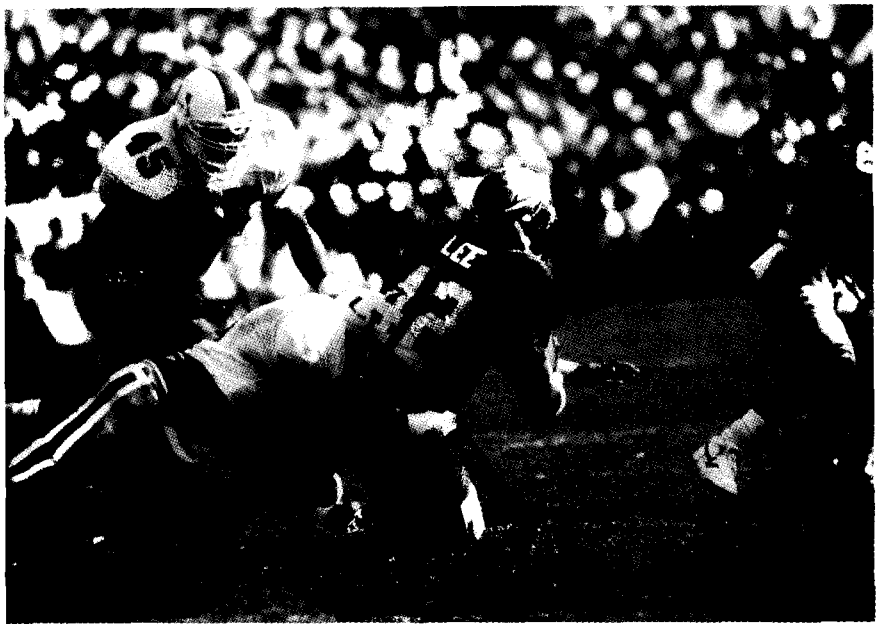
Turning Dreams into Realities



The "Hitachi Promise of Tomorrow" scholarship program encourages student athletes to take the lessons learned on the football field today and teach children in the classrooms tomorrow.

Encouraging Student Athletes to Become Teachers

During his three years as nose guard on Louisiana State University's football team, John Mawae came to know the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat. But nothing moved him more than working with disabled children in a Special Olympics held at LSU. "Seeing those kids realize their dreams against all odds really got to me," Mawae recalls. "I knew then what I wanted to do: help kids like them realize their dreams."

Mawae will get that chance, thanks in part to the "Hitachi Promise of Tomorrow" scholarship program created by the College Football Association (CFA) and sponsored by Hitachi, Ltd. Started last academic year, the program awards $335,000 in scholarships at the 67 CFA member universities. At each university, a $5,000 scholarship is awarded to an outstanding senior or graduate student who intends to become a teacher and has participated in the school's football program as a player, trainer, or manager. Mawae, a 1992 scholarship recipient, intends to use his grant to pursue a career teaching kids with special needs.

"Teaching plays an important but undervalued role in society," says Charles M. Neinas, the CFA's executive director. "We'd like to encourage more student athletes to pursue this field, because we think that what they learn on the football field helps to make them effective teachers in the classroom."

Nicole Hagner, a recent University of Pittsburgh graduate, agrees. "Athletics teaches you that it's possible to turn the right dream into a reality through hard work, discipline and teamwork. I'd like to bring that lesson to the classroom," she says. Hagner, who served as a student trainer on Pitt's football team, plans to use her grant to become certified as a high school biology teacher.

Nicole Hagner, University of Pittsburgh graduate and 1992 scholarship recipient.

As college football fans and parents of school-age children, we are proud to be a part of the "Hitachi Promise of Tomorrow" scholarship program. We hope that it helps more student athletes like John and Nicole to realize their dreams of becoming teachers.

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